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Russia Probes Chapman Brothers, British Empire Museum Goes Rogue, and More



Photo by Dave M. Benett/Getty Images

Dinos and Jake Chapman

by BLOUIN ARTINFO

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– **Chapman Brothers Under Fire in Russia:** The members of **Pussy Riot** aren't the only ones getting targeted in Russia for allegedly mocking the Church with their art. British artists **Jake** and **Dinos Chapman** are being investigated by Russian prosecutors for potentially violating the country's extremism laws with their recent installation at the **Hermitage Museum**. The work featured figurines dressed in Nazi uniforms and showed scientist **Stephen Hawking** speaking with Adam and Eve. [[Independent](#)]

– **British Empire Museum Loses Trove of Loans:** Bristol's **British Empire and Commonwealth Museum** — which is now closed and being audited by the city council, and investigated by police — has lost some 144 loaned objects and artworks. Some of the missing artifacts may have been sold against owners' wishes and without their knowledge. "I decided I would like the picture back," said **Lord Caldecote** of his **Thomas Buttersworth** painting. "It turned out the museum had sold the picture through **Christie's**. I don't suppose we'll be able to get it back again." [Guardian]

– **Cooper Union Students Stage Protest:** Dozens of students, alumni, and supporters of design school **Cooper Union** gathered in Washington Square Park on Saturday to march in protest of the school's plans to begin charging tuition. "[Founder] **Peter Cooper** must be rolling in his grave," said art student **Saar Shemesh**. The protest is the latest in a series of actions planned by students, including storming a trustee meeting to weep in front of board members and staging a sit-in inside the school's clock tower. [DNAinfo]

– **Flash Art Launches Its Own Art Fair:** The Italian magazine **Flash Art** is launching its own art fair in Milan. The event will take place from February 7 to 10 and feature 80 galleries that will mount solo presentations or curatorial projects. If you aren't sick of art fairs after a week in Miami, hop on a plane to Italy! [FT]

– **Property Magnate Commissions Portrait Series:** When does art collecting become a form of megalomania? Ask Manila-based property magnate **Robbie Antonio**. The collector has commissioned a dozen artists to paint his portrait, including **Kenny Scharf**, **Marilyn Minter**, **David LaChapelle**, and **Julian Opie**. He hopes to work with **Takashi Murakami** next. "I wanted to work with artists I like, to see how they interpret me. I want to be seen in their eyes," Antonio said. [TAN]

– **Meet the Mole-Catcher of Versailles:** Think you have a cool job? Think again. Gardener **Jerome Dormion**, 36, is the latest in a 330-year dynasty of royal mole-catchers charged with keeping the 2,000 acres surrounding the royal palace of **Versailles** free of burrowing rodents. (His preferred tool is a device that, he says with a smile, "resembles a guillotine.") "It might sound funny, but it's serious work. My job is to make sure molehills don't deface Europe's finest gardens," explained Dormion. "I'm known as the king's mole catcher because Versailles is still the palace... The king might be gone, but the palace still has moles, loads of them." [AP]

– **Turkey Takes to EU Court Over British Museum Sculptures:** A Turkish campaign demanding the return of sculptures created to adorn the **Mausoleum of Halicarnassus** in 350 BCE from the **British Museum** — which acquired the artifacts in the mid-19th century — is trying an unorthodox tactic, using human rights legislation in a European court to force the objects' repatriation. The campaign also includes a petition with 118,000 signatures and a short documentary about the sculptures that will be shown to the Strasbourg court. [Guardian]

– **China Calls for Boycott of Stolen Seal Auction:** The Chinese government has called for a boycott of **Artcurial's** upcoming auction in Paris of an 18th-century jade imperial seal that was looted from Beijing's **Summer Palace** in 1860 during a raid by a Franco-British expedition. China's efforts to have the lot removed from the auction entirely were unsuccessful, and the Qing dynasty artifact is expected to fetch between €150,000-200,000 (\$193,000-258,000). [AFP]

– **Louvre-Lens Opens With Blockbuster Numbers:** Though it won't take up regular hours until Wednesday, the Louvre's new northern outpost, **Louvre-Lens**, was open continuously from 10 a.m. on Saturday until 6 p.m. on Monday, a 32-hour span during which it was visited by a whopping 36,000 people, making for a grand total of 51,000 visitors in its pre-opening week, including French president **François Hollande**. The institution expects attendance for its first year to reach 700,000, with half-a-million annually thereafter. [AFP]