

ART & ANTIQUES - SUMMER 1997

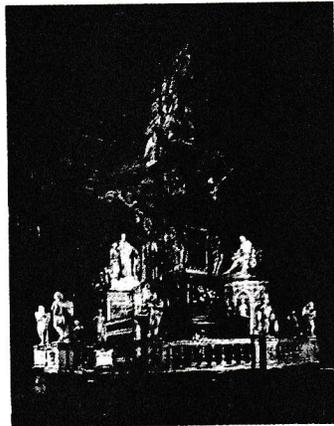
SKETCHBOOK

Edited by Stephen Wallis

Summer's News and Notes

Chapel in Ashes

Quick on the heels of last year's fire that destroyed the Fenice Theater in Venice, disaster has struck Italy again. On the night of April 11, fire consumed the Chapel of the Holy Shroud, in the Duomo of Turin. The blaze started around 11 P.M., just as a gala banquet ended in the adjacent Royal Palace. Guests, including U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, were filing out when the first alarms went off.



It appears the blaze was sparked by wiring in the chapel, where a \$1.7-million restoration project was nearing conclusion. The Shroud of Turin, believed by some to be Christ's cerement, was saved,

but the chapel (interior at left), a masterpiece by 17th-century architect Guarino Guarini, was gutted. The fire spread to the Royal Palace, where flames destroyed some 150 paintings. "The paintings dating from the 19th century, which represented collecting trends of the House of Savoy, were a great loss," says Carla

Enrica Spanitgati, superintendent for fine arts of Piedmont, "and water infiltration into the palace has caused serious damage. But by far the greatest loss was the chapel itself." Funds are already being set aside for the restoration, which is expected to cost at least \$40 million. ELIZABETH HELMAN MINCHILLI

Russian Nationalism Here & There

In April, the cars of Russian diplomats formed a blockade outside Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art, where the exhibition "Jewels of the Romanovs" was preparing to depart for Houston. Despite commitments more than a year old, officials at the Russian Culture Ministry sent word that the czarist jewels should return to Moscow. After two weeks of negotiations in which exhibition organizers agreed to give the Russians a greater share of the revenues, the show was allowed to move on. At press time, talks were continuing over the fate of the rest of the planned tour, which includes stops in San Diego and Memphis.

While money appears to have been behind the standoff, there was more than a hint of nationalist sentiment in the accompanying talk about protecting Russian patrimony. To be sure, nationalism is alive and well in Russia. In May, the Russian parliament's upper house followed the lower house in overriding President Boris Yeltsin's veto of a new law, passed last winter, which claims Russian ownership of artworks taken from Germany at the end of World War II (see Sketchbook, February). It is the first time both houses have overturned a veto, and Yeltsin is now expected to take the issue to the Constitutional Court. S.W.

Bringing Art to Life

The lights go up and Winslow Homer's *Snap the Whip* stands before you, at vastly increased scale—life-size, in fact; life-like, too. So much so that one of the boys at the tail of the whip appears to be wobbling—and on the verge of giggling. It's one of the tableaux vivants staged at the annual Pageant of the Masters in Laguna Beach, California. These re-creations of famous paintings and sculptures, by living people in fancy dress and makeup (yes, those are real people at right, portraying Katsukawa's *Enjoying the Cool of Evening*), are conducted nightly each summer at Laguna's Irvine Bowl.

Spirit of the Masters, as it was originally called, was conceived by artist John Hinchman during the Depression as a way of attracting warm-hearted tourists with cold cash to the beachside community. The pageant now draws hundreds of thousands of visitors and has expanded its palette to offer 20 different re-creations

during the two-hour spectacle. This season (July 9–August 30) opens with "Treasures from the Valley of the Kings," featuring a gold-painted man imitating Tutankhamen. Also on the bill are Leonardo's *The*



Last Supper, Fragonard's *The Swing*, a piece of Meissen porcelain, and from our own century, Wyeth's *Christina's World*. HUNTER

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