

Archaeological Treasures Yet to Come

by strannikov

Curators have special doors, secret to themselves alone, no curator takes any other's route to work. One curator faced this problem: "was this artist free, or is his art true?" He could not ask the artist: the painting wasn't signed. Perhaps possibly maybe it's a Bosch. But identifying the work wasn't his job. Only the painting could say whether the art is true, whether the artist was free was not as important. He was a curator and not a poet and was not qualified to say, and he felt genuinely unqualified to say. He understood his job as curator this way: that it was up to him to watch such a painting be displayed. But apart from his strict role as curator, he watched this painting for years, detecting subtle change. The museum's catalog description changed much less than the painting over those years. He wasn't curator-in-chief of catalog descriptions, however, that task went to a curator arriving by another door. When he had not known this painting so well, he hadn't known whether it is true or not. Now that he'd all but decided that the painting is true, he wondered whether the truth had changed, too. And he wondered whether the painting's change was a matter of keeping up with changing truth, but axiology tended to exhaust him. Being a curator, he decided, is yet another tough job, except that he had his own door to get to work by. Yes, having your own door to get to work by can be no small consolation.

He had a brother who was an excavator, who uncovered a distant artifact. Excavators often are not bothered with doors but do still get to work as they choose, we may say. His excavator brother asked a question not part of his job description: "was this artifact once true?" He dusted it off with a small brush with wiry bristles, but any former truth adhering to the artifact was not thereby removed. Well, yes and no: only after he'd dusted off the artifact did

he think he might've done well to've left it in the ground. Dusting off the artifact had in no way been a way of applying truth to it: it had not become true simply by virtue of its excavation. So one dark night before his team left the site of excavation, he reburied the artifact, slightly deeper than at the level he'd uncovered it. "Save it for some other excavator," he thought as he shoveled, "I'm too tired to think about it!"

These two brothers each had one other brother, who was a simple gravedigger. He continually buried. If he ever excavated, it was only by accident. He never curated, though he watched a skull each day at work. This skull he had excavated by accident his very first day on the job, and he'd kept it ever since, carrying it with him from gravesite to gravesite. This skull never changed in the slightest, not in any way he ever learned to discern, at least. The skull sometimes grew dusty, it is true, but the dust in no appreciable way ever changed the skull itself. This brother could never think of this skull as an artifact, and for this reason and also because he was not a trained excavator, he never reburied it. "This skull," he well knew, without ever consulting either of his brothers, "this skull is someone's truth." But in every likelihood, it wasn't Bosch's truth.

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