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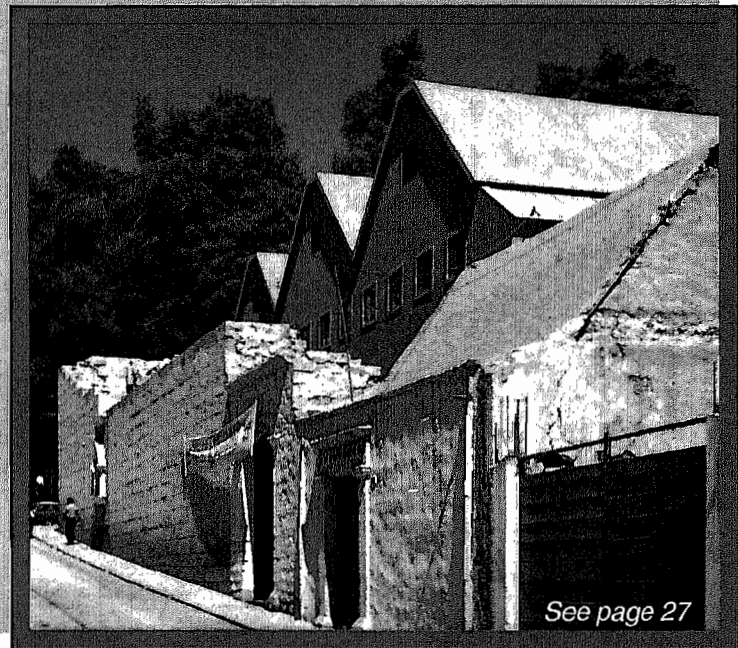
## NA SAA Award Nominations

The Award for Excellence . . . we are especially pleased to solicit nominations for rock art and quantitative studies . . . the Student Paper Award recognizes . . . outstanding original research contributions by students . . .

in memory of the late Fred Plog . . . the Plog Fellowship will support ABD research . . .

*See page 18*

“ Moquegua is a modest city of almost 40,000 people on the desert Pacific slope of the Andes. . . . Nevertheless, right on the main square, nestled within the remaining walls of the collapsed 19th-century cathedral, stands a 9,700 square foot, three-story, modern archaeological museum. . . . Admission costs about as much as a bottle of soda, and less or nothing for those unable to afford that. . . . Any sensible person might wonder what such an oversized institution is doing in such a sleepy little town. . . . ”



*See page 27*

## Exchanges — Interamerican Dialogue



In April 2000, two well-known institutions, in the United States and France, exhibited prehispanic archaeological pieces. In doing so, the institutions demonstrated two diametrically opposed policies toward the black market in stolen pieces. Dumbarton Oaks, the dynamic research center in Washington, D.C., promotes studies on the history of landscape architecture, Byzantine art, and Precolumbian art. It is famous for its small but select collection of Mesoamerican objects collected by Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss over 50 years, beginning in 1912. In 1962, the Blisses donated their Precolumbian collection to Dumbarton Oaks (which had been on loan to Harvard University since 1940). The Bliss legacy does not purchase looted antiquities; it funds serious academic meetings, a fellowship program, three specialized libraries, and various series of publications.

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*“ . . . faced with the option of purchasing a work of art on the black market. . . . instead they requested a piece on loan from the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. This decision respected the third ethical principle of SAA that condemns the commercialization of archaeological objects because it contributes to the destruction of sites and the contextual information fundamental to the understanding of the archaeological record.”*

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Recently, the board of Dumbarton Oaks decided to include a new archaeological piece in the gallery in honor of the former curator of the Precolumbian collection. Jeffrey Quilter and his exceptional group of advisors were faced with the option of purchasing a work of art on the black market. Instead, they requested a piece on loan from the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. This decision respected the third ethical principle of the Society for American Archaeology that condemns the commercialization of archaeological objects because it contributes to the destruction of sites and the contextual information fundamental to the understanding of the archaeological record. One of the

## Conflict of Interests?

Leonardo López Luján

so-called smiling figures from Nopiloa (Veracruz, Mexico) was chosen, restored for the occasion, and, following a detailed study of the piece, placed on display. It should be mentioned that the piece in question was obtained legally by the Peabody Museum, thanks to an exchange promoted by Román Pia Chan.

The second institution, the Louvre, the largest museum in the world, followed a different policy. The Louvre recently inaugurated rooms dedicated to the inappropriately titled “Arts Premiers of Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania” in the ample Pavillon des Sessions. Supported by President Chirac and coordinated by the art dealer and collector Jacques Kerchache, 120 pieces entered the museum’s displays. What makes this purchase so alarming is the fact that the Louvre invested approximately 150 million francs to acquire stolen objects. These objects are protected under the UNESCO Convention of 1970 and their purchase is condemned by the professional code of International Council of Museums (ICOM). Among the new treasures of the Louvre are two *nok* terracotas from Nigeria (which is included on ICOM’s red list of especially threatened works), an *uli* sculpture from Melanesia, a polychrome figurine from Chupcuaro, and a Maya vase from the Petén. As if that were not enough, pieces that have been known for decades to be false were present, including a *moai kavakava* from Easter Island and a mask representing the Aztec god Xipe Totec.

The Louvre’s recent purchase seemingly legitimizes and promotes the clandestine art market. The effects are already visible: The value of *uli* sculptures has multiplied tenfold in the black market; the Parisian auction house Drouot has several *nok* pieces for sale that were illegally taken out of their country; and furtive antiquity hunters are devastating Equatorial African archaeological sites. Fortunately, the Louvre’s purchases have been denounced in the French press as well as by ICOM, UNESCO, the Société des Americanistes, and the governments of Nigeria and Niger. Strangely enough, the Mexican government issued no comment regarding such harmful practices that negatively affect both our cultural patrimony and the scientific advances of our discipline. It also contributed to the magnum museographic operation by lending a greenstone Olmec figurine discovered at El Manat, Veracruz! ❏

*Leonardo López Luján is with the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City, Mexico.*