

Collecting



Francisco Goya's "Whicker" (detail), 1794. (Courtesy: Museo Reina Sofía)

The Spanish proposition

Private museums | Attracted by economic stability and a dynamic cultural scene, collectors are looking to Spain to establish permanent premises. Paul Richardson reports

There are reasons to think that a mid-century art boom is under way in Spain. In a residential boom on the city of Madrid, the Paseo del Prado is being redeveloped, and the city is investing in new museums. In a city of 3 million, the city is investing in new museums. In a city of 3 million, the city is investing in new museums.

In preparation, the Museo Reina Sofía is investing in new museums. In a city of 3 million, the city is investing in new museums. In a city of 3 million, the city is investing in new museums.

It is a good time to be a collector in Spain. In a city of 3 million, the city is investing in new museums. In a city of 3 million, the city is investing in new museums.



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Seventy-two per cent of the world's 317 private art museums have opened since 2000.

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Medieval warrior in auction battle

Lewis chessmen
Almost two centuries after the discovery of a buried hoard of ancient chess pieces on the Isle of Lewis, another has emerged on the market. By Susan Mawer

Of all the "hot" objects to follow, few could rival a Lewis chessman. These distinctive carvings of kings, queens, bishops, knights and monks in the guise of animal "warriors" are among the most prized pieces of ancient chess ever discovered.

And now, almost two centuries after the buried hoard was first discovered on the Outer Hebrides Isle of Lewis, another of these 10th-century wooden (or stone?) figures, a solitary warrior, has reemerged on the market. Its date as a 10th-century piece is unassailable, but perhaps it was not.

The reason is that the details of the discovery of this mysterious hoard—the exact location and size of the find and its initial dispersal—remain shrouded in mystery, and very possibly already misrepresented. I've been asked to investigate the Lewis Chessmen and the origins of the 10th-century art market.

What is known for sure is that 93 stone carvings, 50 of them chessmen, were shown to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in Edinburgh in April 1831. At some point they were sold to John McLeod, an antique dealer who reportedly sold 10 of them on before suggesting that the British Museum purchase the remaining 83. He reportedly acquired the rest of the hoard, which led to the antiquary who acquired the 83 pieces was able to name another chessman on Lewis (the "11th stone" found in the Hebrides Islands context). It is unclear how many pieces, if any, remained on the island or were sold in Edinburgh. When those chessmen were carved—and they are likely to have been produced in great numbers—the Western Isles belonged to the kingdom of Norway, and the carvings of which only explain one suggests that Lewis chessmen were made in Trondheim.



The details of the discovery of this hoard are shrouded in mystery.

Given their general lack of wear, it also seems likely that they were part of the stock of a merchant.

The missing pieces, one knight and four warriors.