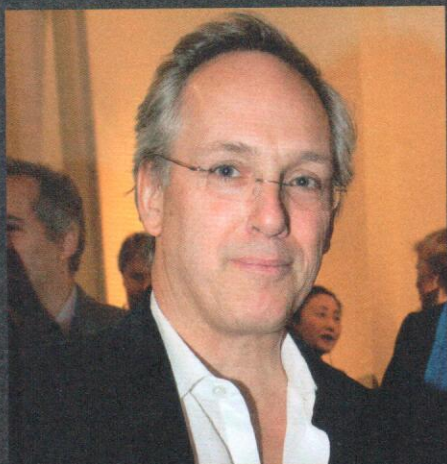


The importance of art



The Sutton Hoo belt-buckle. Gold, hollow with cast ornament. Early Anglo-Saxon, early 7th century. Found in the Sutton Hoo Ship-burial Mound: 1, Suffolk, England. © The Trustees of the British Museum



Sir Paul Ruddock (1976), co-founder of Landsdowne Partners and patron to the arts, talks about where his love of art began, his philanthropic giving and involvement with museums, and the importance of museums to society.

When did your love of art begin?

In the 60s and 70s, entertainment options were limited in England. At weekends my parents would take us to museums and National Trust houses and, whereas a lot of children didn't like that, I loved it. We would also go to London once a year, when I would visit the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the British Museum – two places that triggered my love of the medieval.

My parents were not collectors – I don't think they had any particular interest in art themselves – but it was that exposure that drew me to the arts and from an early age I was a compulsive collector. I remember being up in the Orkney Islands on holiday when eight years old and using a year's pocket money to buy a little boat made out of bone. I was always a collector, even when I had no money.

What drew you to collecting medieval art?

I've always liked medieval art, partly because around Europe, and particularly within the UK, one of the few things that survive are the great medieval churches and houses. In 1988

I was on holiday in Sicily and every day I walked by an antique store that had a 13th/14th century marble lion in the window. It was quite a lot of money for me at the time but I ended up buying it. I realised that in those days I could buy good works of medieval art for not much more than a degree show art student's painting. So, it was partly that I loved the material and also because it was quite affordable at the time.

What prompted your philanthropy to the arts?

A lot of museums had become dusty and uninspiring by the mid-90s, despite having amazing objects, and I felt there were certain things that needed to be done. Lighting and showcasing had become so much more sophisticated – you just had to look in Topshop's window to see that – yet museum exhibits were stuck in these dull old cases. So, in the mid-90s I called up the V&A, which I'd always loved, and said "Look, I'd like to help you." To which they responded, "What do you mean?" Development didn't really exist in the 90s. I started off by giving about £10,000 and it built from there.



My wife and I gave some money to the British Galleries project at the V&A in 1999 then, as my business started to become successful, around 2001 I offered to kick-start the renovation of the Medieval Galleries with a fairly significant pledge. This was the first big gift I had made and it was fantastic when the suite of 13 renovated Medieval and Renaissance Galleries opened in 2009. We then supported the renovation of the Cast Courts Gallery with Trajan's Column at the V&A and the Medieval Europe and Sutton Hoo galleries at the British Museum. This is what had excited me as a boy and my goal was to educate and inspire people in the way that I had been inspired by these collections.

Talking of Sutton Hoo, have you seen *The Dig*?

Not only have I seen it but I did a YouTube where I interviewed the writer John Preston, who is an old friend, and Sue Brunning, the curator of the Sutton Hoo gallery. John is the nephew of Peggy Piggott, played by Lily James in the film. It was in August 1939 on the eve of the Second World War that Basil Brown started his digging but he wasn't credited with the find originally, which was a terrible example of class snobbery as he was viewed as just a self-educated, jobbing excavator.

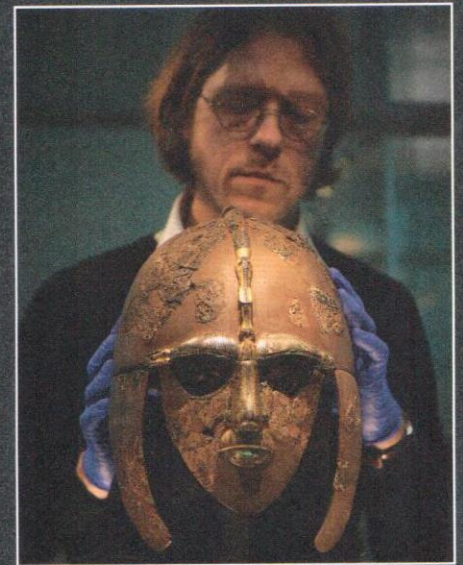
Do you still think a class divide exists?

Far less than when I started working. If you think about artists historically, they were often outsiders, but it was the establishment that bought art. Britain was very reactionary in terms of art, even artists like Picasso were considered undesirable right through to the 60s. I credit Nick Serota with transforming Britain's art

scene with projects like the Turner Prize. Some of those Turner Prize artists, like Antony Gormley, were products of the Oxbridge world but then you had others like Grayson Perry, Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin who were outsiders and really helped shape British art in the late 20th century. By the 80s Britain was known widely in the contemporary art world and I think the class structure in terms of art became almost irrelevant in the UK.

Have you seen accessibility to museums change?

When I first became a trustee of the V&A in 2002, we were getting about a million visitors a year. Now, the V&A (pre-Covid) gets about four million visitors a year and a lot of that increase was to do with the renovation of many of the galleries, making them more accessible as well as having exhibitions that excited people. It's also how the show is put on. The Scythians exhibition at the British Museum educated us about the amazing nomadic tribes that ranged from China

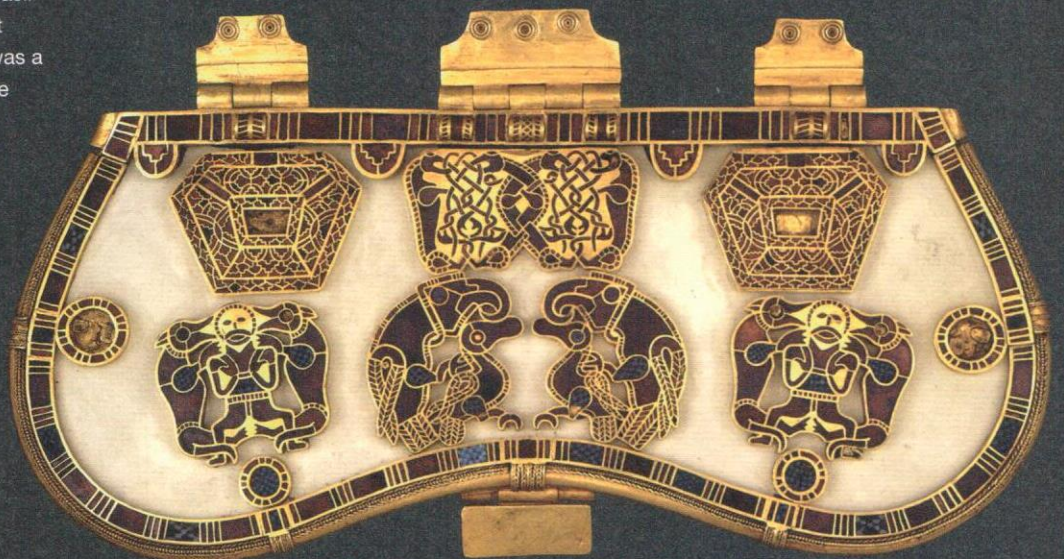


Installation of the Sutton Hoo helmet in the Sir Paul and Lady Ruddock Gallery of Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300-1100 at the British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum

through to the Black Sea from around the 7th century to 2nd century BCE and who produced the most amazing gold artefacts. Most people knew nothing about them and this show not only educated but also really excited visitors.

What does your role on the board of museums involve?

Boards of national museums are complicated. I was on the board of the V&A for 13 years and chairman for eight, I've been on the British Museum board for four years, on the Metropolitan Museum board for 11 years and I was on the Courtauld board. First and foremost the role of trustees is to safeguard the collections, ensuring that the fabric of the building is well looked after, that the visitor experience is good, that there's enough curatorial expertise, etc. At the British



The Sutton Hoo Purse-Lid. Gold, cloisonné garnet and millefiori glass. Early Anglo-Saxon, early 7th century. Found in the Sutton Hoo Ship-burial Mound: 1, Suffolk, England. © The Trustees of the British Museum



© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

“It’s very easy to erase history, it’s much harder to recreate it.”

Museum we’re at the early stages of a massive renovation including building a new £80 million research and storage centre near Reading. During my time at the V&A we undertook a renovation of almost two thirds of the museum.

Secondly, you give advice. On the acquisitions side, my expertise is obviously medieval, so I’m in a position to, not know more than curators, but support them in acquisitions if I think it’s appropriate – same at the Met. Then fundraising is important. Not all trustees can do that, but raising funds from philanthropists, corporations, foundations and from government was a key part of my role as chair and trustee. Then there’s a lot of what I call ticking boxes: making sure the policies are good, that when we authorise loans the objects are in a good state of conservation and are going to a secure place. Essentially overseeing that the management has done what needs to be done. People



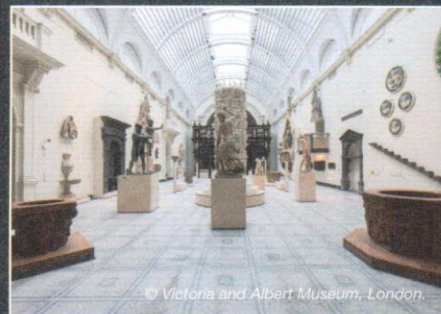
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

think being a trustee is just sitting on a board and listening but there is a huge amount of time and expertise required.

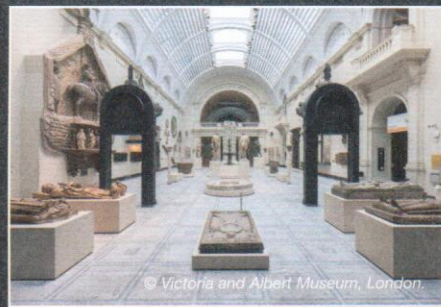
Finally, we are reviewing how our collections relate to the current world and looking more closely at the history of their acquisition and where appropriate being much more transparent about this history.

What has been the impact of the pandemic?

The national museums have been getting support from government but are still losing money and having to eat into reserves. Having said that, I think the national institutions will be fine, it may be tough for a few years but when tourism picks back up we’ve got amazing collections and people will go to exhibitions. In the performing arts it’s been brutal, particularly the independent performing arts sector. For independent theatres and small regional museums that



© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

don’t have access to big philanthropists and have maybe been cut back by local authorities more severely, I do worry whether they’ll survive this.

Why is it so important that museums survive?

Firstly, they are a repository of the creativity of humankind since the earliest dates. At the British Museum, you can see axe flints from half a million years ago and figurative art from 20,000 years ago. Whether you are looking at Egyptian art, Syrian, Greek, Asian or African, what you realise is artists then were just as, if not more talented than artists today.

Secondly, I think they’re inspirational and also show the interaction of cultures. One of the things I love about Sutton Hoo and our gallery in the British Museum is that the ship burial had Anglo-Saxon jewellery, Byzantine plates from Constantinople, dirhams from the Arabic world, Lapis Lazuli from Afghanistan, garnets from Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka), and items from Scandinavia. It shows the interconnectivity that the world has always had and I think that’s really important.

Think of the damage caused to our collective history when we go through periods of iconoclasm; there’s so little art that survived in Britain pre-1540 apart from our churches because it was all destroyed by Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell. There is almost nothing that survives pre-1066, apart from archaeological findings, because the Normans destroyed everything Anglo-Saxon. It’s very easy to erase history, it’s much harder to recreate it. I think that’s why it is important, particularly in times like this, that we continue to value the amazing collections within our museums. ○