

Art Crime

Terrorists, Tomb Raiders, Forgers and Thieves

Edited by

Noah Charney



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Association for Research into Crimes against Art

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Foreword

Advances in the study of art crime and the importance of protecting and identifying cultural property

The title of this book triggers some questions. Normally when the term *art crime* is used, one thinks about thefts of paintings, sculptures and antiques, or new *objets d'art* or, in the worst case, a work of art that is so ugly or repulsive that some consider it an art crime in itself. But looking at the contents of this book, edited by Noah Charney, I found several chapters dealing with terms such as cultural property, collectable objects, antiquities, cultural heritage, art, archives and libraries. Nevertheless, taking into account the roots of the editor of this volume, namely the Association for Research into Crimes against Art (ARCA) and the criminological background of the majority of the contributing authors, I do understand, in this case, the use of art as the adjective to accompany the crime.

Still, I think that the term “cultural property” covers a broader perspective than just art and, at the same time, provides a legal reference that makes it clear that property cannot be damaged, stolen or completely destroyed without legal repercussions. Apart from that, cultural property does not have to be art, *per se*, and can stand for multiple material and immaterial cultural representations, often directly linked to identities. Of course, this all is food for thought, and we must not forget the international (academic) heritage debate.

Having said this, an important element that all types of art, cultural heritage, cultural properties and cultural resources can suffer from, which consequently then serves as a common denominator, is crime. To combat and prevent crimes related to cultural property, one still has to answer the much-debated question of what one may classify as cultural heritage or property. It should be simple to ascertain here that the scope of how different types of cultural heritage are classified begins and ends with tangible and intangible heritage, but that would be too easy. My aim is rather to reflect and contemplate on what is, in my opinion, a combination of these three types, triggering discussions about overlaps in the nature and identity of art and heritage, as well as the natural and intangible forms of cultural property. If cultural property is adequately identified, it will be easier to find and further develop the appropriate legitimate penal sanctions and legal protection instruments with which to protect it.

At the beginning of 2014, I visited the war-stricken areas of Mali. I traveled with our Blue Shield team, including Joris Kila, Christo Grozev and Siratigui Sogoba, to the town of Timbuktu. The goal was to assess and investigate