Sir Paul Ruddock | Art and Culture in a Post COVID World

- Hello everybody, welcome back. Hi, Paul.

- [Sir Paul] Hi, Wendy.

- [Wendy] Hi, how are you?

- Good, good.

- Today, I am delighted to welcome Sir Paul Ruddock to Lockdown University. Paul will reflect on art and culture in a post-COVID world. Sir Paul is chairman of Oxford University Endowment Management Limited and chair of the Oxford University Investment Committee, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and a co-chair of the International Council, a trustee of the British Museum, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, Bancroft Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford University. My brother was also at Oxford, in that same college, Paul.

- Oh, that's a small world.

- Yes, absolutely. He's a member of the Bard Graduate Centre Executive Planning Committee; a member of the Bard Graduate Centre Board; a member of the Getty International Council, and an Ambassador of Africa Kids. Sir Paul is the former chairman of the Victoria & Albert Museum, having served two terms. Sir Paul has received honorary doctorates from Birmingham University and Bowdoin College, Maine, for philanthropy and services to the Arts. In 2015, Sir Paul was made a Chevalier dans Ordre des Arts et Lettres for services to French art awarded by the French government's minister of culture, and won the Montblanc Cultural Patronage Prize in 2014.

In December 2011, he was knighted for his services to art and philanthropy. Sir Paul is co-founder of Lansdowne Partners, from which he retired as CEO at the end of June 2013. He previously worked at Goldman Sachs and Schroder Wertheim from 1980 to 1998. Wow, Paul! That's a wonderful bio! Congratulations. So, we are thrilled to have you with us tonight, and I'm going to hand you over to Carly Maisel, who will be in conversation with you. We are looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

- Thanks, Wendy. I'm very pleased to be here, part of your Lockdown University.

- [Wendy] Thank you.

- Thank you, Wendy. Hi Paul.

- [Sir Paul] Hi, Carly.

- So Wendy's given us a whistle stop tour through an incredible CV, but I wanted to go back a couple of decades and ask you to tell us how you first became passionate about the Arts. Is it something that's always been a part of your life?

- Well, it's more than a few, a couple of decades, Carly, it's more like five-plus decades. So I came from just a very ordinary middle class family. My father was a civil servant, my mother was a teacher, so they weren't collectors. We lived a normal middle class life, but I always was interested in things. I collected stamps and then I collected coins, and probably by the time I was 12, I had a penny for almost every year from about 1850, apart from the one of Edward VIII, which is impossible to get because he reigned for so little time.

But the two things that really started me on my love of the Arts were, on my eighth birthday, my parents bought me a copy of the British Museum's Lewis Chess Set, which is a 12th century chess set in the British Museum. Very famous because it's used in Harry Potter as well. So I learned to play chess on that replica of a 12th century chess set, which is still in my office here in London. And then secondly, around the same time we went to the Victoria & Albert Museum. We lived near Birmingham in England, so about 100 miles from London.

But we went to the Victoria & Albert Museum, and it was quite a dusty place in those days, and a lot of it was boarded off, but I remember looking through this plywood hoarding and seeing through it, these amazing sculptures, including a copy of Trajan's Column, the great column in Rome to the Trajan wars. The V&A has a full size copy of this in two bits. I was just kind of wowed, in the middle of London you could find something so extraordinary. So I think it was those two things, the chess set, and seeing these amazing replicas in the V&A that started me on my journey to discover and study art.

- And you've really dedicated a lot of your volunteer time to the world of arts and culture. Why do you feel art is so important in society?

- Well, I think it always has been. I think if you think about what makes life have meaning, apart from human interaction, it's beauty and the way that humanity comments on their own society. So I think from time immemorial, there's been a desperate need for humans to create art, sometimes to interact with their gods, if you look at early idols; sometimes to celebrate their achievements, you've only got to look at the Assyrians, or the Greeks, or the Egyptians; sometimes to memorialise death and the afterlife, and also to create beautiful surroundings.

And I think there's been a desire by humanity, from the earliest days, to create beautiful surroundings in their architecture, in the statues they create, in the frescoes that they've put on the walls and the paintings. So I think it's a very deep rooted need in society, which I think you see alive and well today, whether it's being in street art, whether it's commissions for new buildings. Just think, each time the Olympics happens, how every country wants to outdo itself in terms of beautiful stadiums and swimming pools and what have you. So I think it's a very essential part of humanity, this desire to create beautiful things and to memorialise the world

around us.

- So, to quote Wendy for a second, she often says that "art builds bridges and it's an equaliser." You sit on a number of museums which are accessible and open to the public. Do you feel those museums are an equaliser? And what role do they play in society?

- They can be an equaliser, but they can also be a separator. I think one of the great things about, say, the British museums is that they have free access. Anybody can wander in at any time. At the same time, I think we need to appreciate that in the West, the museums have a very Eurocentric, very white history and appearance, and that there is maybe a disproportionate emphasis put on the art of Europe from the Greeks onwards that on the art of the rest of the world. And I think we're at an interesting inflexion point for museums in reassessing how art is displayed. So I think how museums are perceived changes throughout time.

I think they can be an equaliser. They are open to everybody, but they can also be quite daunting if you come from a background where you've not been exposed to that. So part of what we're trying to do is to make museums more accessible and you can do that through education, through school trips, through what we're doing online. But it's a challenge and it's something that I think people are focusing on much more now, particularly with the Black Lives Matter movement and other movements over the last few years than there were a decade or two ago.

- So to continue in that vein, do you think that people will return to the physicality of museums? I mean, SFMOMA, for example, now allows you to view pretty much its whole collection online. The websites and working with virtual reality. One day you'll be able to feel like you are in the rotunda of the Guggenheim, walking through the exhibitions from your home in London. How do you think museums can get people back through the door and also use this as bridging that equaliser we talked about?

- Well, I think you're right, short term. We've gone from a museum world which was 95% real world, 5% digital, to a world which is 95% digital, 5% real world. But at the same time, I think people crave the actual tangibility of seeing the artefacts themselves. When you look at something on a screen, it's hard to know whether it is 20 feet high, like a stature of Ramses II, or one inch high, like a tiny little amulet. So I think you lose a sense of scale. I think you lose your sense of the physicality.

And I also think it goes back to, there is a tangible need that people have for the real object. So I'll give you one example. The Fine Arts Museum in San Francisco, during lockdown, had an appeal to the Bay community for artists to come up with works of art reflecting what was going on and to submit them. They were going to choose, then, highlights for an exhibition. They thought they might get two or 300 works. In fact, they had 6,000 artists presenting 11,000 works, and that's just in the Bay area. So I think there is a real need that people have, both to create and to see actual art.

Clearly, as virtual reality and augmented reality gets more and more sophisticated, we may get some change there, but I still think there is an aura around seeing an actual object, and there's a patina of wear that carries something in it. There's a smell. If you go into an old church, for example, there is a smell of incense that can never really be replicated in a digital format. So I'm a great believer in the significance of the artefact itself. That's not to say that digital hasn't been wonderful during this lockdown, but I think it does not replace seeing the actual objects.

- And that's true of museums, but how does it work when you cross over into the theatre world or the performance world? Much has been said about the challenge for those performing to really bridge the gap, digitally. Do you think that's something that can be done, or do you think we do need to return to the physicality for that?

- Well, no, I think it's a good point. I think what has been shown in lockdown, again, is just how good digital viewing can be of performances. So take "Hamilton", on the Disney Channel, I was stunned, actually, how good that was, because when you go to the theatre, and I've seen "Hamilton" two or three times, you can't see as close up as you can with the filming that was done for the TV presentation. So you understood a little bit more the skill of the actors, the nuances and so on. But at the same time, there wasn't that frisson of excitement that you get when you're physically in a theatre. Can you imagine, when you go, well, certainly when I was younger, I used to go to rock concerts.

The excitement, the sheer energy of the crowd and the way it feeds back on the performance, I think it's very difficult. I mean, a great performance is often driven by the feedback from the crowd or the audience. So I'm a complete believer that we will get back to physical performances, that people want to go to physical performances. And it's also a means of community. Coming back to museums, My wife organised something at the V&A a few days ago, a small show for some friends of the Kimono show, and what was interesting.

This was a show that the V&A had put on about the history of kimonos from the 16th, 17th century to the present day, how we've got some wonderful survivals from the late Middle Ages, how we've got some of the European adaptations and how it influenced designers like Alexander McQueen. But what was interesting was people going around that show together, discussing it, getting excited together. That's much harder to do when you're just watching it by yourself on your iPad or in front of your television.

- So that leads nicely into, I wanted to talk for a second about the Second Half Centre, which I know Jill founded, but you sit on the board of. And you started that a couple of years ago, to combat isolation in an ageing population. Who knew that was going to become even more crucial? How do you feel that art can help in isolation, but also to bridge that gap that we are finding in the separation of communities?

- Well, I think what's interesting, Jill set up the Second Half Centre now eight years ago. And one of the core activities... this is a centre that provides something like 70, 80 hours a week of

activities for people, typically 70 years upwards. The average age is approaching 80. And it was everything from cooking classes to IT classes, to art history classes, to painting classes. And I think a few things, firstly, it brought out people's inner creativity. So people that had not necessarily painted before took up painting. Secondly, it was a means of community, because often, as you get older, if you lose a spouse and you're less mobile, you can become very lonely and insular, and this was a way of creating community.

But bringing it forward, I think what has happened in lockdown around the world is that the older community who may have been digital dinosaurs, have got up to speed remarkably quickly on things like Zoom, FaceTime, webinars, and so on. So you could actually argue that this lockdown, in a funny way, has accelerated people's accessibility, as they get older, to the digital world, which has to be a positive. So I think that's quite good. And I think the ability, particularly if you are immobile, if you are suffering from health issues and you can't get out, what the digital world now provides, that would've been impossible 10 years ago and not even conceivable 25 years ago, is just amazing.

I'm a huge fan of this explosion in digital media, and I think that the excitement, even when people can't see the actual artefacts, that the digital can bring, and I'll give you another example. The Getty had this project, I'm not sure how it started, but where people started dressing up as Getty paintings and then posting it. It was just wonderful. The imagination and the creativity that people brought to bear on these tableau that they created and posted was wonderful. So I think it can really play on itself as well, in a very successful way.

- So, to push you a little more, as in your role at the British Museum, last week, one of the largest studies, 125,000 people, came out on what do people expect from art post-COVID, and only 9% of people said that they would prioritise going to an art museum. So, how do art museums look to pivot to the future, aside from just the Zoom piece or updating their website? Can they look to be more engaged with local communities rather than being a building in central?

- Well, I think the great museums have three communities. They've got a global community, a national community, and a local community. And I think that the fact, at the moment the people are thinking, "Oh, I can't get out, I've got to put a face mask on, I've got to go around a certain route," clearly acts as somewhat of a detraction for maybe going to museum, short term. But in the UK before COVID, more people would go to museums in a year than go to football matches. The British Museum gets six or 7 million visitors a year.

So does the Met; the Louvre gets 9 million. People love seeing these, but I think that the pivot that is going to happen is that the conversation that a museum has with its audience is changing. Firstly, I think that the audience wants to take more ownership of that conversation. They don't just want to be told, they want to be part of it. I think the transparency of the conversation the museums have, again, going back to, how did things get into museums during the Colonial era? Many got in through trade, many got in through gifts, but some got in through

violence. And I think talking about that and not trying to hide it is a significant change and improvement on what we used to have. So I'll give you, again, a simple example. Sir Hans Sloane, who's the founder of the British Museum, he was a doctor in the 18th century who married a wealthy heiress who was a plantation heiress.

So his wealth was, indirectly, through his wife, coming from slaves. And at the same time, he built up this incredible collection of 80,000 manuscripts, natural history example works about which he gave to the British government on his death on condition that a public museum with free access was created. So one of the things that we've done at the British Museum, is take his statue literally off the plinth and put in a cabinet and explain that, not only was he a great philanthropist, doctor, anatomist, natural historian, but he was also a slave owner. And I think there needs to be some nuance to these conversations because he was a man of his time, but we also shouldn't hide from it.

And I also think, in terms of going back to the global, the national, and the local, British museums, 70% of the visitors are typically overseas tourists. Well, we may not see many of them for quite some time, but it's really important as we do and we need to do more of, is taking the British Museum out to the rest of Britain. And one of the things that I've been talking about with the director is using 3D high-resolution replicas of key artefacts like the Rosetta Stone, like some of the great Egyptian mummies, like the Lewis Chess set, and touring them around so we can actually take these objects so that people, even if they can't come to London to see them, can, effectively.

Because the quality of replication now is so extraordinary that I think you can still excite people by doing this. And then of course, it's in the local community as well. And I mentioned the Bay Area area example, but I also think that just getting, at times like this, getting more and more children into the museums when the museums aren't crowded is very important. Because, take the Victoria & Albert Museum; the Victoria & Albert Museum is probably the greatest museum of design in the world. If you talk to any of the great British designers, whether it was Terrence Conrad when he was alive, whether it's Paul Smith, whether it's Vivienne Westwood, they all spent hundreds of hours at the V&A, studying the textile collections, studying the prints and drawings, getting ideas from the collections.

So I think that the more we help the community continue to be motivated and inspired by the collections, the better. So I think it comes down to the conversation we have globally is important because again, what the universal museums do is they show the connections between civilizations. They show to the fact that, at the same time as ancient Egypt, you had the amazing Assyrian Empire in Iraq, a bit later you had the Achaemenid Empire in Iran going on at the same time as the classical Greek Empire.

The interactions through trade, the Sutton Hoo ship burial of the 7th century in the British Museum, which was found in East Anglia in 1939 on the eve of the Second World War by a lady called Mrs. Priddy, on her land. Within that, not only were there amazing Anglo-Saxon jewels,

there were also plates from Byzantium, from Constantinople. The garnets on the jewels had come from Sri Lanka, Ceylon. There was lapis that had come all the way from Afghanistan and there were some Islamic coins. Very early Islamic coins. So it's a fascinating example of, even in the 7th century, how the world was so interconnected.

And I think what the great museums have shown for a long time is they've highlighted how civilizations across the world, from Oceana to China, to South America, et cetera, have had incredible creativity throughout their history. That conversation and that highlighting, in a sense, the universality of human imagination, and the fact that humans have, for millennia, traded and interacted and been influenced by each other. It's all the more important now. We are about showing that global conversation, rather than retreating into nationalism and xenophobia, and I think it's a very important time for museums to stand up and continue talking about that.

- So it sounds to me like the British Museum has actually been a little ahead of its time in terms of acknowledging the background of many of its treasures and how they need to be navigated in society. Last week, the National Trust took some heat for starting to suggest it does the same thing. Do you think that the British Museum could play a role as a leader, encouraging other museums to embrace that background and examine it with honesty? You touched on Black Lives Matter, you touched on some of the challenges that these museums face if they're honest about their collections. But that's a very difficult conversation to start. How do you think the British Museum has done that successfully?

- I think we're right at the start of that conversation, the British Museum. I wouldn't like to suggest we're at the forefront, but we are being actively thinking about it. One of the ways that we are organising it is just the conversations with the source countries. So if we look at Benin in Nigeria, Benin City, back in 1897, the British launched punitive raid on the chief, the Oba of Benin. There'd been a diplomatic incident and we sent in a force and we basically looted the palace and captured the Oba and sent him to exile.

And those works of art, those bronzes and ivories, ended up a lot in the British Museum and throughout the rest of the world in other museums. Now, the conversation we're having with Benin is Benin's building a museum. We are helping advise them on how to train curators. We are going to lend them objects. They're not really in a position to take the whole collection back and if they took the whole collection back, the rest of the world doesn't get to see what fantastic art they had. But we're acknowledging that the circumstances in which those objects came into the British Museum are dubious, so we are working very closely with them.

If we look, for example, at Iraq, we're working, again, training curators on conservation, on mapping of monuments. So our approach is to try and give our expertise, our expertise of conservation, our expertise, our knowledge, and to provide that to many countries that don't have that experience. We have training programmes for curators from those countries at the British Museum. But in terms of the National Trust, I think this conversation about how the National Trust issue is that a lot of these grand houses that they look after, often the people who

built them 2, 3, 500 years ago may have made their money in ways that now are considered completely immoral. And that's part of just, in a sense, retelling the story. It's part of, you can't rewrite history, you can't change that, but you can talk about it.

And I think it's having that conversation which is important. And I think the other thing, in the telling of stories, is to include the opinion of those, the views of the societies from which those objects came. So it's to take rather than just a curator tell you "This is the way it is," to include the stories of why certain African fetish figures, what were the roles that they played in their society, what were the roles of, in the Aztecs or the Incas, the various ceremonial knives and skulls and what have you. So we get a more rounded view of what these objects were used for, how societies viewed them or worshipped them. I think it is just a different way of looking at things, more appropriate to where we are today.

- Obviously, you've explained to the audience why you believe culture, and historical cultural artefacts particularly, are incredibly important, even for the future progression of society. During the almost decade-long war in Syria, thousands of antiquities have been destroyed or stolen. And in fact, the head of the Syrian antiquities for the UNESCO World Heritage site was beheaded, trying to protect the remaining parts of the collection. How do you feel the balance fits in a war when you've got the antiquities and the cultural heritage of a lot of these societies? What can institutions like the British Museum do, or what should governments, and even armies do to protect cultural heritage?

- Well, I think it's a very good question. In certain wars, historically, it was almost understood that you did not go after iconic, religious, or significant buildings of the opposing side. I think we're in a world where that is no longer the case at all. I think, clearly, it would be very nice to prioritise. As in the Iraq war, it would've been good if the Allied forces had sent tanks to protect the national museum in Baghdad before it got looted, but the priority in war has to be to save civilian life. So I understand the wishlist to protect cultural artefacts usually comes second to the imperative, either to win the war or to save civilian life.

So it's a complicated thing. I would say the following, though, which, firstly we see a lot of iconoclasm. We've seen iconoclasm throughout all periods. We saw iconoclasm during the English Civil War where the puritans were destroying religious artefacts. We saw it during the French Revolution. We've seen it with the Taliban in Afghanistan with the Buddhas there. And we've seen it clearly in Syria, with ISIS blowing up large amounts of Palmira. So I think there are two responses to that. It's almost impossible to protect that in a war zone, but it makes two things very important. One is the actual recording ahead of time of endangered monuments. So I mentioned replication earlier.

A friend of mine called Adam Lowe has a wonderful company called Factum Arte, which is a fabricator and makes sculptures for Anish Kapoor and Marina Abramović and so on. But it also has a foundation which is 3D-mapping many endangered monuments around the world, whether it's rock art in Africa, whether it's temples in the Middle East. So I think, firstly, just the

recording of these artefacts is very, very important, given the amount of conflict we see in so many areas. I think the second thing is, it highlights, in a sense, the role of the universal museums. Because if you think about Iraq, a lot of the objects that are in Western museums came from archaeologists doing work in the mid 19th century with the complete agreement of the... The local authorities at the time, with partage agreements where some of those objects went to the local museums and some came into, whether it's the Met or the British Museum or the Louvre, and that has provided a safe haven for those objects.

So the fact that we have so much preserved is partly because they've been in safe havens. And I think it's also an obligation of these great museums to safeguard many of the treasures of the world for the next 500 to 1,000 years. If you think back to the war in Afghanistan, the treasures of Afghanistan were taken out of the country, and I can't remember if they were taken to Switzerland, but they were taken out of the country for safety for a long period during that war and then when things calmed down, they were brought back. Thank God they were saved, otherwise they'd have been looted, melted down or sold, stolen, on the black market. So it's a complicated subject. There is no easy solution. But I do think the replication of endangered monuments and the recording of them is an important start.

- So, another topic that's filling the newspapers at the moment is around inclusion and equity, both in museums but also in collections, in their leadership, in their staff. You sit on a number of museum boards and have done for a long time, so I wanted to ask, how do you feel board members can play a role in helping to ensure diversity in the collections, in the leadership and their staff, and how can the museum and the cultural world start to make real change?

- No, I think that's a good question. There are two separate sides. I think museum boards, certainly in the U.K. and the U.S., have been quite good over the last few years at board inclusion, meaning there's quite good representation of different ethnic groups within the board. That is not the same at the curatorial level. So that goes back to education and encouraging people from all backgrounds early on, that the arts are open to them to study as well, and that is a long process. Because if you look at most museums in the west, there are not many minority curators, so I think it's a slow process.

I think, in terms of the collections, it's a little different for American museums from European museums. European museums have virtually no acquisition budgets. American museums have quite large acquisition budgets, and you could look at quite a few American museums the Met excluded, and they basically are collections of white European art. They're collections of built up by the great industrialists in the late 19th, early 20th century, where the canon of art was considered to start with Greece, go up through Rome into the high Middle Ages, Renaissance, and then French 18th century.

So a lot of American museums are basically full of white art. So there are many ways, when you look at your acquisition policy, that you can expand on that. For example, buying contemporary Black American artists or contemporary Middle Eastern artists. But it's also thinking about,

maybe in areas where, by including Persian art into your collections, including your North African art, not Egyptian, but Moroccan, Libyan, et cetera. I think there are a lot of areas that have been neglected historically, but where the communities are throwing out fantastic contemporary art and have been doing for a long time. So I think looking at acquisition policies is important. And also, in terms of exhibition programming, making sure that there is more balance on exhibition programming, so that different cultures are very well represented. I think it is something the museums are thinking very actively about at the moment.

- And in terms of practically speaking, how do you convince someone from an underprivileged background that the arts and culture world is something that they should consider as a career? Given the economic challenges today, what kind of practical policies could actually be put in place?

- Okay, well there are multiple things. Firstly, the more school kids you bring into museums, particularly from less privileged areas, the better. You know, it's like me. I'm not saying I came from an underprivileged area, but going around a museum aged eight and getting excited about art. You want to excite children about art and then you want to have programmes to keep that interest fostered. And some of that is, particularly internships, focusing your internships on taking people from different ethnic backgrounds, bursaries, if that is possible, encouraging, I mean, one of the problems is, so much of education today wants to focus on the STEM subjects, science and technology, engineering and maths.

I think it's very important that the liberal arts tradition continues to be fostered. So I think it's at multiple levels. I think it is museums continuing to argue for the arts as an important part of the curriculum. I think it's particularly important to get school kids in, and that also is curators going and talking to those schools and talking to them about things that are accessible, not going and talking to them about French 18th century paintings, but going and talking to them about things that are relevant to them, which may be, if you're going to a school in Harlem, talking about contemporary Black American art, or it may be talking about African art. There are lots of ways to do it, but I do think education is the absolute key to it.

- And how much of a role does, let's say, the British government play here? Last week, someone from the British government suggested, although some of that maybe have been headline sensationalism, that the arts community needed to retrain. What followed was many, many memes of artists doing all types of jobs, including being your cybersecurity expert and fixing your computer. But joking aside, the government would need to support or encourage these types of policy changes you are suggesting. Do you feel this is something that governments can prioritise, given people are currently living paycheck to paycheck?

- Firstly, I think it was a ridiculous comment that that cabinet minister made. I mean, just beyond stupid. Look, art, with the exception of a few famous artists, has always been an underpaid and underappreciated career move. You've got to want to do it. But I think it is so important to the soul of society, whether it's theatre, acting, directing, painting, sculpting, digital, whatever. So I

think it is critical. But in terms of the role of the government in museums, and we're somewhat fortunate in Europe compared to America, because our model has always had significant state support. Now, on the continent, many museums are almost entirely funded by the state, whereas, in the U.K., over the last 20 years, it's come to typically the big museums are maybe 40% funded.

But at times of crisis, they are national museums, they are owned by the country, for the country, and the government does stand behind them. I worry a lot in America that the purely commercial element, in the sense that museums rely on their entrance fees, they rely on their merchandising, they rely on philanthropy, and apart from the Met and one or two, or the Getty and so on, most museums do not have large endowments. So I do worry about that lack of government support in America for the arts. So it's always complicated.

Of course, there's never enough money. I mean, the British government has given a very large amount towards heritage. It's given money to also support sole practitioners. It's never going to be enough so philanthropy has to play a role as well and I'm not saying it's going to be easy. But I think, in Europe, we're in somewhat better shape than maybe, and I don't want to speak for America, but I do think it's tough in America where there is almost no government support for the arts.

- So you do now see a lot more arts on your streets than you did traditionally, whether it's from an organisation that Wendy sits on the board of, Public Art Fund, in America, or whether it's, commercially speaking, the Frieze Sculpture Garden in Regents Park. How important do you think is, walking past Ai Weiwei in the middle of New York, or people really being able to touch and access art as a part of their daily life?

- I think it's vital. I think it's so much fun. I was in the West End today, in London, and there's a whole Mayfair sculpture not show, but everywhere you go, there's some big monumental sculptures. I think it's fun. I think it's exciting. You know, the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square has been such a huge success, where artists are commissioned for whatever it is, six months, to create a work of art. Sometimes it's unpopular, sometimes it's controversial, but it creates a conversation.

And again, it goes back to what I was saying earlier, throughout history, there has been public art and sometimes it's celebrating individuals; sometimes it's celebrating causes; sometimes it's controversial; sometimes, as we see, it becomes inappropriate because it's celebrating things that now, through the lens of history, we strongly disapprove of. But I think it's something that enriches society. There is nothing worse than going to a city in one of the developing countries where it is just all new skyscrapers, no greenery and no public art. It's depressing.

And I think one of the great things that Europe, if you think about Italy, the public square, you always had a public square, and in the centre of the square was a monument or a statue, from the Romans onwards. So I think it creates a focal point. It's a talking point, and I think it

beautifies the environment.

- So returning to the financial strains on the art world at the moment, some of the steps that a number of museums are taking is to deaccession art, effectively to be able to sell off some of their key works. Do you think that's something that should be encouraged during this economic challenge? Or is this really something that should be restrained at all options?

- Well, I think it's not a binary issue. I mean, in the UK we are actually not allowed to deaccession from our museums, from the national museums. But I've obviously seen what's going on in Brooklyn, what's going on in Baltimore. I think it's very depressing, that if you start selling off key objects to help fund your running costs, 'cause I know the guidelines have been loosened recently, you're basically selling the family silver. What are you going to be left with? Now, I am in favour of museums clearing out the old storage cabinets of things, where they've got...

If you are a museum and you've got four Bruegels and one of them is very subpar and you've got three much better ones, then I have no problem with that being sold to fund other acquisitions. But if you start doing things to fund your running costs, it's a very, very slippery slope. And I believe, I'm not sure if it was Bryce Martin, but there was an artist I know in Baltimore, where the artist had given one of his key paintings to the Baltimore Museum of Art, and they are looking to sell that. And I think that's just wrong, because particularly if an artist gives a work of art, and an important work of art, that should be in perpetuity. So I think we've just got to be very careful, so I'm not saying never deaccession.

The Met, we deaccession regularly, but we're deaccessioning stuff that might have been given to us 50 years ago and just isn't very good. The risk of deaccessioning, apart from the fact you sell off treasures, is you also sell off things that are just out of fashion. If you look at tribal art, Oceanic or African or South American, there was a time where it was considered inferior to Western art, and there was a tendency to feel that this is something that we can easily sell, nobody's going to miss it. And then I think, over time, as knowledge, as there's more research, there's more appreciation, you suddenly found, you sold things that are actually really very important.

So I'm very wary about selling objects, just because they're not in fashion. I mean, I think an extreme example of that would be the Albright Knox Museum, which about 10 years, 10 or 15 years ago, sold off an incredible collection of antiquities and mediaeval art with fantastic provenances to buy more contemporary art and I think that fundamentally lessened the museum. They're just buying more contemporary art like a dozen other museums, but they got rid of some objects which were some of the best in class, which you can never acquire again on the open market. So I think it's a tricky area, it's a slippery slope, if you do it to fund running costs and I think you've got to be very wary. That's not to say that cleaning out the cupboard of old artefacts that will never go on display isn't a bad thing.

- So I'd be remiss as we come towards the end, not to mention the Parthenon's request to have the Elgin Marbles returned to Athens. And obviously, this has been a hot topic and one that, I think, is still rumbling on, but, where do you see that going and do you believe that the British Museum must continue to hold onto them, even though Athens could take them back and does have space for them? Where do you see the future of the Elgin Marbles?

- Okay, well firstly, I have to say I'm a British Museum trustee, and I do believe in the official line that they should stay in the British Museum. I'd say the following, firstly, they were not taken by force. They were taken under a decree from the then-ruling power, the Ottomans. The Parthenon had been used as an explosives store, which is why half of it got blown up in the 18th century. The then Greeks were using chunks of the Parthenon to make lime mortar. It was not well cared for. There is clearly debate about the terms under which Elgin took them.

He did buy them, but there's debate on that. If they go back, though, they're not going back to the Parthenon, they're going back to another museum. They've been in Britain for 200 years and this again goes back to rewriting history. It's a little different when things were taken at the point of a gun. So I'm in favour of them staying where they are, where 6 million people a year typically get to see them, where they tell the story of how that amazing Greek art sets the landscape for art for the next 2,000 years, as you move into the Romans and then ultimately into the Renaissance. But I'm not disagreeing with the fact it's a controversial area.

- So you've got nearly 1,000 people watching from around the world, and they all have their favourite museum or their cultural hotspot. And the museums, I can comment, in New York are doing a valiant effort to make themselves safe as much as possible and do everything they can to be a lighthouse in the storm for people. So, what would you say to people now who just aren't sure that art and culture is a priority? You've got 1,000 listeners here who, I think, could probably really make a difference.

- Well, I think again, what is humanity about? What survives our lives, our children's lives, our grandchildren's lives? It is the environment around you. It's the literature that we create. It is the art that we create. Why do we cherish these objects in museums that go back thousands of years? Because it tells us there's a connection with the humanity of those periods. It shows that, whether you were living in Athens in the 5th century or the 4th century , or whether you were living in Renaissance Florence, or whether you're living in New York today, there is a shared humanity, and I think these objects give a tangibility to that.

And you just know, if you just look at the comments from people when the Met reopened at the end of August or the British Museum reopened, the excitement that people felt going back into these wonderful buildings, the sheer excitement of again being in a place of contemplation, where there's a magic to what humanity has achieved and created over the millennia. And the digital can't replace that. You stand in front of the statue of Ramses II, in the British Museum, you go, "Oh my God, this is just amazing. How could they do that?" And that was made over 3000 years ago. So I think it's that magic, it's that awe, the wonder that the physical reality

presents you, and museums are always going to have that and that's why we need to get them as accessible as possible again.

- So this is only part one in the Sir Paul Ruddock Lockdown Show, and tomorrow night you are back, but this time focusing on a collection piece from the Byzantine era. So maybe you could give a little promo for tomorrow night?

- Sure. I have a collection called the Wyvern Collection, and we've been gradually publishing works from this collection. It started a few years ago with mediaeval sculpture, then last year, mediaeval ivories and small works of art, and we have just published. There's a wonderful man called Dr. Marco Aimone who has published a catalogue of Byzantine and Sasanian silver and enamels, and tomorrow night he... It's available on Amazon, Thames & Hudson. And tomorrow night he is going to be in conversation with Dr. Paul Williamson, who was the former head of the Victoria & Albert's sculpture, metalwork and glass department for many decades.

And Paul wrote the first two catalogues, and he'll be in conversation with Marco about this amazing, quite undiscovered period. I mean, the Roman Empire, one forgets, carried on for a full thousand years after the fall of Rome. It wasn't until 1453 that the Ottomans finally conquered Constantinople, modern day Istanbul. And it's ironic today that the great church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, in Istanbul, which was 1,000 years old in 1453, then became a mosque for the next 470 years. And then it was a museum for about 100 years and is now being turned back into a mosque.

And it's fascinating because this 1,000 years of Byzantine history created tremendous works of art. But I think because, for most of that period, certainly the 19th century, it was under the Ottomans, the West did not pay it the attention that it warranted. So we're trying to shed some light on that, and Paul and Marco will be in conversation about it tomorrow with some amazing objects.

- Thank you very much, Paul. So now I'm going to hand back over to Wendy.

- Paul?

- [Sir Paul] Hi, Wendy.

- Hello, hello, I'm back, sorry, it took a little while. Paul, thank you very much for that fascinating hour. Thank you, Carly, that was wonderful. It was an absolute privilege to hear from you. The role of arts and culture is fundamental to cohesive societies, in my opinion. As you know, I agree with you. And during COVID, we have seen the need to find ways to connect and reach across the void of isolation. We must not allow art to diminish as we struggle to emerge from this darkness. We have to work very hard at maintaining that. Arts and culture matter, to learn from our past, to celebrate our identity, to represent our beliefs, to recognise our differences in our common humanity.

So this is why we need to support arts and culture from the grassroots projects in rural Africa, to classrooms in Manhattan, to museums new and old. Who knows, Paul, maybe one day, your kids, my kids, our grandchildren, will take us to the Instagram Museum. In a post-COVID world that is even more likely. Supporting arts and culture is supporting learning, history, science, self-expression, and creativity.

It is the fabric of who we are as people, and as people, we need art and culture as a tool to forge social cohesion. I keep saying that over and over again. So Paul, continued efforts in this space is integral for the good of our future generations to come, and I look forward together with working together with you and Jill and all our like-minded colleagues to make this happen. So Paul, thank you very, very much for a fabulous hour and we look forward to hearing from you again tomorrow.

- Fantastic, Wendy, thank you so much. Thank you.

- Thanks for joining us. Thank you, and thank you, Carly, and to all of you, to all our participants, thanks for joining us again. For those of you in Britain and South Africa and Israel, goodnight! And for all of those on the American continent, enjoy the rest of your day! Thank you! And Canada. Night night!