

PARTHENON PROVENANCES

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There is no way of dealing artistically with the Parthenon marbles with anything even resembling aesthetic disinterest. Neither romantic transcendence nor modernist autonomy is available for the contemporary artist who engages with the bits and pieces of carved Pentelic marble created under the direction of the sculptor Phidias in the fifth century BCE, and that appeared as a public collection in a London gallery in February 1817. When Espen Gleditsch in February 2022 entered the Duveen Gallery in the British Museum and turned his handheld camera on the Parthenon frieze, the work was caught in an inexorable political cobweb. That has been the case since the British ambassador to Constantinople from 1799 to 1803, Thomas Bruce, the 7th Earl of Elgin, in 1801 headed to Athens armed with several so-called *firmans* issued by the Ottoman authorities. The operation was controversial even back then. When Lord Elgin, who had financed his Acropolis adventures from private funds and was ruined by his obsession, proposed to sell his collection to the British Museum in 1815, the British Parliament debated the legality of the contracts he had entered into. Accusations of bribery, threats, and gross violations of the spirit of the agreement have haunted the collection to this day.¹ In 1816, the British government bought the collection for £35,000 and deposited it in the British Museum.

Only the last 50 years has the claim for returning the marbles to Athens become a national matter between England and Greece. The first formal claim was set forth by the Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri in 1983, when the former actress was photographed crying in the Duveen Gallery – effectively evoking a centuries-old tradition of travelers bursting into tears when ascending the Acropolis, exposed to the sublime ruin

of the biggest Doric temple in the world. Mercouri's televised debate with the director of the British Museum made a watershed moment. It led to the establishment of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, a change in public opinion, and mounting requests for restituting the marbles to Athens by politicians, academics, lawyers, museum officials, architects, and artists.

It is a recent piece of news, presented to the Greek public in the newspaper *Ta Nea* in July 2022, that in 1986, the President of the Oxford Union, classics student Boris Johnson, published an article in an Oxford magazine where he characterized Elgin's operations as unlawful, «wholesale pillage» while critiquing the British government for «sophistry and intransigence»: «The Elgin marbles should leave this northern whisky-drinking guilt-culture, and be displayed where they belong: in a country of bright sunshine and the landscape of Achilles.»² As Prime Minister, Johnson saw the matter differently: «The UK government has a firm longstanding position on the sculptures, which is that they were legally acquired by Lord Elgin,» he assured in 2021.³ Twenty years ago, confronting the inevitable reality of a new Acropolis Museum, the British Parliament debated a proposed law on the restitution of the Elgin Marbles. According to one Minister of Parliament, the scenario represented nothing less than a disastrous «iconoclastic de-contextualization» that «would open a Pandora's box.»⁴ The debate was heated, and opinions differed: «The Parthenon cannot come to the marbles. They, therefore, should go back to the Parthenon,» argued another MP.⁵ Also popular culture has taken interest in the matter. In 2014, while promoting the movie *The Monuments Men*, George Clooney claimed «It is the right thing to do,» elaborating further in 2021: «There are a lot of historical artefacts that should be returned to their original owners, but none more important than the Parthenon Marbles.»⁶ Recently, the Oxford Institute of Digital Archeology recorded the Elgin marbles, had them carved by a robot in both Pentelic and Carrara marble, and displayed at a venue adjacent to the British Museum from August 29, 2022. The set will be presented to the British Museum: «When two people want the same cake, baking a second, identical cake is an obvious solution,» as the director of the institute, Roger Michel, explained in July 2022.⁷

The new Acropolis Museum in Athens, inaugurated in 2009, was a gamechanger. When Bernard Tschumi won the competition in 2001, he responded to a competition brief that read as a political-legal and museum-historical manifest in disguise. Sprinkled with references to «the Acropolis masterpieces» and the «architectural members and sculptures that have been removed from the Acropolis monuments», the competition program declared war on the British Museum: «the envisaged return of the Parthenon pediment marbles (the so-called 'Elgin Marbles') necessitates the creation of corresponding areas for their display.»⁸ This striking demand for restoring the marbles to Athens was translated into a compelling architectural rhetoric and a building whose

most conspicuous feature involves the display of a collection which the museum does not possess. Located 300 meters from the Acropolis and flooded in Attic light, the weathered, honey-colored Greek original slabs of the frieze are combined with uniformly white plaster casts pointing to the exiled fragments in London. The message has not been lost on neither critics nor on visitors with no particular interest in issues of repatriation: «It's impossible to stand in the top-floor galleries, in full view of the Parthenon's ravaged, sun-bleached frame, without craving the marbles' return,» New York Times' architectural critic exclaimed after the opening.⁹

The new museum aptly invalidated the unceasing British argument that first the Turks, then the Greeks, were incapable of taking care of what is promoted as universal heritage, and that the relocation to London was part of a noble salvage operation. At a time when the remains of the buildings on the Acropolis were being recirculated as dispersed building materials in a small and remote city in the Ottoman Empire, the British ambassador could defend his fairly comprehensive dismantling of the Parthenon as protecting priceless works of art against barbaric conduct. Yet, there were counter voices from the very beginning, and with a prominent exponent in Lord Byron's 1812 momentary bestseller *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: «The last, the worst, dull spoiler, who was he?,» the poem asks malignantly, leaving no doubt whatsoever about who had destroyed what even «Goth, and Turk, and Time hath spar'd.»¹⁰ Also the British Museum's first catalogues, for sale in the museum shop from 1812 onwards, reveal some ambiguity towards the modern trope destruction-versus-preservation. Yet, considering their peculiar circumstances «unhappily exposed», as the museum explained emerging museum audiences, «we must look for the entire acquittal of Lord Elgin for the extensive dilapidations which he committed upon the Parthenon.»¹¹

Today, the British Museum downplays the imperial connotations of the eponymous collection and its precarious provenance by talking about the Parthenon Marbles rather than the Elgin Marbles. Still, at a moment when critical issues are haunting Western museums, and particularly those that still cling to the Enlightenment ideal of being universal depositories of art, the tide is turning, fast and forcefully. January 2022, The Times declared that «The sculptures belong in Athens. They should now return.»¹²

Gleditsch's series from the Duveen Gallery is of course not a statement on restitution. The images are beautiful, the framing is partly unexpected and beautiful, and surely the Parthenon frieze is beautiful. The photographs evoke the impressions of an eye-witness to the marvels in London November 1815, the Neoclassical superstar Antonio Canova, who himself never went to Greece: «Everything here breaths life, with a veracity, with an exquisite knowledge of art ... The naked flesh is perfect, and most beautiful of its kind.»¹³ Still, a two centuries-old debate and its present, unforeseen momentum render

the inescapable backdrop for what Gleditsch encountered in London in February 2022. So precisely, what is he looking at? What is he capturing with his camera? He is looking at very specific museum pieces with a very specific provenance. Looking at the Parthenon frieze as installed in the Duveen Gallery is something very different from looking at fragments from the Parthenon in Athens. Gleditsch's interest in classical sculpture, modernist architecture, museum spaces, and not least in colors and surfaces, comes together in *mmmMarbles*, where the extremely precise depiction of the stone evokes both historical circumstance and conceptual abstraction.

At a first glimpse, the photographs look as if they are depicting ancient sculpture in a deadpan manner; presenting fragments of a major work of antiquity somehow lifted out of time. Yet, the Parthenon is a monument that is forever fluctuating both in situ, as marble exhibits and as plaster casts, and which prominently showcases the intricate relations between ever-changing originals and their serialized reproductions across media.

Before being canonized as one of the world's most perfect structures, the Parthenon had served as a Greek temple, a Byzantine as well as a Catholic church, a Muslim mosque, a palace – and intermittently – as a quarry. Functioning as a gunpowder arsenal under the Ottoman Empire, the relatively intact structure became a virtual ruin during the Venetian fleet's bombardment of the Acropolis in 1687 when the roof was blown off, the northern wall collapsed and what remained of the structure was left severely damaged. Erected in only fifteen years, between 447–432 BCE, and dedicated to the goddess Athena on a site that had been burned to the ground during the so-called Persian wars, Pericles commissioned the temple from the stellar architects Iktinos and Kallikrates. Phidias, the greatest sculptor across Hellenic culture at the time, was in charge of the sculptural program. His almost twelve meter-tall chryselephantine sculpture of Athena Parthenos in the temple cella was destroyed already in antiquity, while most of the pediment sculptures on the east front were gone by the 18th century.

Except for on the North-facing side, much of the originally 160-meters long external frieze running on the four sides, as well as many of the metopes, were still on the temple when Lord Elgin and his team arrived in Athens.

In the late 18th and throughout the 19th century, a number of western diplomats engaged in excavations and in collecting antiquities while stationed abroad. As a British ambassador Elgin took part in the imperial English-French race for antiquities in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The licenses from the Ottoman authorities granted Elgin with his agents, two architects, two artists, and importantly, two *formatori* access to the Acropolis in 1801, to document and measure the site by drawings and casts, as well as the right to remove certain loose figures found on the ground.¹⁴

However, the venture soon evolved into a more ambitious project. At the time, the temple ruin still housed the mosque, the Acropolis was inhabited and partly covered with adobe housing.¹⁵ Elgin purchased and pulled down a number of these cottages to dig in the ground and had scaffolding erected to cut off substantial pieces of the frieze, the metopes and the pediment sculpture. They also gathered already relocated parts of the frieze, such as the more than four-meters long central slab of the Eastern frieze that at the time sat in a wall at the Acropolis, and cut it into two pieces to ease the transport to England.¹⁶ In what in hindsight reads as the epitome of a colonial enterprise, the British Museum's catalogues described the operation as an excavation, at times involving 300–400 locals working under the painter Giovanni Battista Lusieri's command: «Greeks as well as Turks; who far from expressing any dissatisfaction at the proceedings from superstitious or political feelings, or any regret at the departure of such monuments of art, and of the ancient magnificence and power of their country, appear to have been gratified with the profitable occupation it afforded them.»¹⁷ By 1804, 170 crates had been shipped off to London, containing more than half of the still existing marbles from the temple, including 75 meters of the frieze – a substantial part originating from the south wall – 15 of the original 92 metopes, most of the sculptures from the east pediment, and a number of the more broken figures from the west front. Among the travelers who visited Acropolis during Elgin's campaign was the young grand tourist Robert Smirke, a student at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and the future architect of the British Museum's new premises in Bloomsbury. Upon its completion in 1852, the south front with eight columns was scaled after the temple fronts, clearly evoking the museum's proudest possession, the Parthenon collection that the architect had observed in its making in Athens in 1803.

Having spent three years as a prisoner of war in France on his way home, Lord Elgin arrived in London only in 1806. Lusieri – who altogether spent 21 years in Athens where he died in 1822 – shipped the last marbles in 86 cases from Piraeus in 1811. After a delayed voyage, they were finally released from customs in London in July the following year, and united with the rest of the collection which at the time resided in a shed in the backyard of Burlington House.¹⁸ The collection was first installed in 1807 at the corner of Piccadilly and Park Lane in the so-called Elgin Museum, and appeared in 1816 in The Temporary Elgin Room, designed by Robert Smirke on the Bloomsbury site. Here, more than thousand people visited daily. From all over Europe, scholars, architects and artists arrived to see what was indeed a world sensation. As Smirke's museum evolved, the collection got its first permanent gallery in 1835. In 1857, the pediment sculpture, and the frieze and metopes were shown in the First and Second Elgin Room, respectively, before the galleries were extended in 1869, and the sculptures were again integrated in one space.

With the marbles, the museum also secured the molds made by the *formatori* Bernardino Ledus and Vincenzo Rosati in Athens in 1802, documenting the objects that remained on the temple, including most of the frieze on the west side.¹⁹ Cast back in London, they initiated a prolific tradition of disseminating the Parthenon in plaster. Until 1939, the marbles were always shown with plaster casts, and the Parthenon galleries became a laboratory for understanding the fragments' lost totality and original architectural setting, and for trying to establish the original sequence of the breathtakingly executed Panathenaic procession unfolding on the frieze:

«As each new fragment found on the Acropolis or elsewhere were identified as belonging to the Parthenon, British agents would arrange for it to be moulded, and a cast was then added to the collection in the Elgin room.»²⁰ While the Acropolis Museum presents the totality of what still exists of the frieze, the metopes and the pediment sculpture in their original orientation and dimension, the Duveen Gallery displays the marbles in an inverted fashion. The frieze and the metopes are hung slightly above eye-level with the pediment sculptures placed on pedestals, and are perceived as a collection of autonomous artworks, relieved of their initial architectonic purpose and definition. Lord Elgin's interest was, however, more strictly architectural. «My whole plan,» he clarified, «was to measure and to draw everything that remained and could be traced of architecture,» including the frieze, columns, capitals, and so forth.²¹ That made the molds and casts critical in the attempts to model with plaster the entirety of the architectural ensemble.

The importance of these first original casts, as well as later series and editions, cannot be overstated in the artistic and scientific history of this monumental work of architectural sculpture. The Elgin Marbles that were first cast in London 1817, and the new sets produced in 1836–37 and 1872, were much in demand by museums and schools across the western world. Together with casts made in Athens, they circulated internationally, and these constantly updated productions form an intrinsic part of the biography of the frieze, with interesting provenance, in their own right. For instance, in 1845, the British Museum proudly announced that they had obtained casts from several slabs of the northern frieze recently found in situ, parts that «had disappeared before Lord Elgin was in Athens.»²² They were known to have existed as they had been drawn in 1674, thirteen years before the Venetian bombardment, by the draftsman Jacques Carrey, who worked in the service of the French ambassador to Constantinople. The many editions of casts also testify to an exchange of knowledge between Athens and London; an exchange which has surprisingly never been considered as a possible diplomatic common ground in the debates on restitution. When the Acropolis Museum opened with the London holding represented in plaster, the point was simply to show how terrible plaster looks compared to marble. However, this plaster gesture threatened

to backfire, as this series, presented as a gift from the British Government to the King of Greece in the mid-1840s, also revealed how worn the Greek originals are, compared to the casts. The victim of casual vandalism, pilfering tourists, and since the 1960s, pollution, the westside frieze had remained on the temple until 1993.

This point was never lost on the British Museum. When in 1929 the *Illustrated London News* published «The Parthenon Frieze: Effects of a Century of Decay,» new shots of the frieze in Athens were juxtaposed with the British Museum's original casts from 1802. The photographs documented drastic corrosion and revealed «how much the sculptures have suffered in the intervening period.»²³ The readers in 1929, exposed to the frieze shot by the young German photographer Walter Hege at the German Archeological Institute at Athens from a scaffold raised for the Greek archaeologist Nicolaus Balanos' herostratically famous restoration work, could hardly miss the point. The casts in London were clearly closer to the original Parthenon than the eroded marbles in Athens. Yet if this piece of illustrated journalism rehearsed the moral justification of confiscation as conservation, the marbles were also imperiled within the presumed protective space of the museum at a time when most museums were heated by coal-fired stoves. Already in 1851, William R. Hamilton, Elgin's secretary in Athens and in charge of the shipping to London, and later an influential Trustee at the museum, reported that the marbles «are daily becoming more deteriorated by exposure to the London atmosphere, its smoke and dirt and the alterations of heated and damp air.»²⁴ In 1857, the museum had the distinguished chemist Michael Faraday, professor at the Royal Institution, examine the «very dirty» marbles. Faraday affirmed that the discoloration almost without exception «appeared to be due to dirt (arising from dust, smoke, soot, etc.) held, mechanically, by the rough and fissured surface of the stone.» After having experimented with a number of surface treatments, he concluded it unlikely that the marbles could ever again achieve «the state of whiteness which they originally possessed, or in which, as I am informed, like marbles can be seen in Greece and Italy at the present day.»²⁵

No less controversial than Balanos' interventions on-site is the infamous event in conservation history that simultaneously took place in London in the late 1930s, characterized in 2001 by the museum director as «one of the most controversial episodes in the 250 year-long history of the British Museum.»²⁶ The art dealer Joseph Duveen wanted the marbles' surfaces restored to a luminous, classicist white when installed in the new, purpose-built Duveen Gallery, leading to a cleansing process in 1937–38 that forever changed their patina. When the museum realized what had happened, the director instigated an internal enquiry to investigate the «unauthorized and improper efforts to improve the colour of the Parthenon sculptures», affirming that many important pieces had «been greatly damaged.» The investigation disclosed that Duveen had ordered some of his own men as well as some museum staff, to

fill gaps in the marbles, and to employ copper tools, carborundum, wire brushes, hammer and chisel to remove the surfaces «to impart to it a smooth and white appearance.»²⁷

Duveen passed away in the spring 1939 and did not live to see the Elgin Marbles disappearing into the London underground, nor installed in his eponymous gallery that was severely damaged during the Blitz. The marbles were reinstalled in their former gallery in 1948, and the Duveen Gallery was inaugurated only in June 1962.

Lord Duveen's dream of a classical white antiquity and his ambition to «brighten up» the Parthenon ensemble was based on an ideal that is casually ascribed to the German classicist Johann Joachim Winckelmann. In 1755, before embarking to Rome, Winckelmann published the essay «Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture,» based on his studies of bright white plaster casts in Dresden; leading to the famous catchphrase that Greek art embodied «noble simplicity and quiet grandeur» (*edle Einfalt und eine stille Größe*).²⁸ Although this might not necessarily have signified white, it is more interesting how Winckelmann discussed color having studied Roman marble copies of lost Greek originals as well as Renaissance and Neo Classicist sculpture executed in bright white Italian marble in Rome. «Color contributes to beauty, but it is not beauty itself, though it generally enhances beauty and its forms,» he observed in his monumental *History of the Art of Antiquity* of 1764. He praised numerous works in green basalt and a variety of dark and black stones, while observing that «white is the color that reflects the most rays of light, and thus is most easily perceived.»²⁹ To Winckelmann, color is simply secondary to form – an addition and not the subject matter.

During the late 18th century, travelers to Greece reported on traces of color on the ancient temples, and it was soon acknowledged that in antiquity the Greeks had not only ornamented marble statuary with paint, metals, precious stones, pearls and glass, but also fully coated their marble buildings with bright colors. Winckelmann, who never went to Greece, remained the authority to support the cultural misunderstanding that Greek antiquity had been brilliantly white. By the mid 19th century, the polychromy of ancient Greek architecture was long since evidenced by archeologists, architects, and architectural theoreticians such as Quatremere de Quincy (*Le Jupiter Olympien*, 1814), Jacques Ignace Hittorf («De l'architecture polychrome chez les Grecs, ou restitution complète du temple d'Empédocle dans l'acropole de Sélinunte», 1830), and Gottfried Semper (*Vorläufige Bemerkungen über bemalte Architektur und Plastik bei den Alten*, 1834). With these and other publications, images of a restored, fully painted Parthenon circulated across Europe. In 1836, the Royal Institute of British Architects appointed an expert panel «in order to ascertain if any evidence remain as to the employment of color in the decoration of the architecture

or sculpture», as the subtitle of the report read. The committee met twice, in December 1836 and in June 1837, when also Hittorff was summoned from Paris, to examine the marbles in the Elgin Room. They did find traces of color on marbles from elsewhere at the Acropolis, but nothing on the Parthenon marbles. The formatore Raphaëlle Sarti, who was at the time busy making the second set of molds, testified that he had «not been able to discover traces of paint or artificial color on any of the figures of the bas-reliefs, metopes, or sculptures of the pediments,» suggesting this the consequence of the marbles having been washed several times with soap. The chemist Michael Faraday who also served on the panel, confirmed that such treatment «was of itself sufficient to have removed every vestige of colour.»³⁰

The insight that the architecture of Greek antiquity was entirely painted still appears radical. In the mid-19th century, Owen Jones was critiquing a prevailing doxa when addressing the «white-washing» of the history of art and architecture, «the artificial value which white marble has in our eyes,» and the influence under which «we have been born and bred»: «It requires time to shake off the trammels which such early education brings,» he elucidated in *An Apology for the Colouring of the Greek Court*.³¹ «I felt that to colour a Greek monument would be one of the most interesting problems I could undertake; not indeed in the hope that I would be able completely to solve it, but that I might, at least, by the experiment remove the prejudice of many,» he explained having designed the Greek Court at the relocated Crystal Palace at Sydenham.³² Here, he installed the Parthenon frieze made from casts of the Elgin Marbles, combined with casts of parts in Athens, all «skillfully restored» by *formatore* Monti, who left some slabs white while others were painted: «The frieze has been coloured in different ways to show the various opinions that are entertained respecting the Polychromy of the ancients.»³³

Owen Jones' attempt to challenge prejudice was not particularly successful. If the opportunity to see the Parthenon restored to its possible original color splendor was a success with the public, vituperative criticism was voiced by experts and public figures.

Nevertheless, the event was followed by a lovely moment, in what is still referred to as a polychromy debate: Lawrence Alma-Tadeo's first painting set in Greek antiquity, *Phidias Showing the Frieze of the Parthenon to his friends* (1868). Among these friends are Pericles, Alcibiades, Socrates and other Athenian contemporaries to the Parthenon. In this painted vision, they are admiring the northwest corner and the west side of the frieze at eye-level as in a gallery, before the scaffolding Phidias and his crew used was taken down, leaving the frieze forever in shadow twelve meter above the stylobate the temple rests on.

Still, fantasies of a white, pristine monochrome antiquity have proved more ideal than the historical reality, and are not easily overthrown by new evidence on the material historicity of the marbles.

This historical reality and material historicity is part of what Espen Gleditsch is looking at, and what he invites us to see when sharply and serenely depicting what remains of the carved stones. Some of the photographs oddly evoke deep history and geological time: With the figures of the low relief sculptures almost effaced, one could imagine that the faces of gods and humans, the fluid draperies, the instruments and tools, and the astonishing physiognomy of equestrians and galloping horses on the frieze, are in the moment of *becoming* sculpture. Yet, the ravages of time are inescapable; from war, weathering, plundering and so forth in Athens across more than two millennia, and from the series of incidents during the more than two-hundred years the marbles have spent in London. The Parthenon marbles have suffered natural, industrial, and conservation damage. They have a history of salvaging and preservation which has played out in different ways in London and Athens. The Elgin Marbles' itinerary adds to the drama and their rich and partly traumatic biography. The large, central portion of the east frieze that had spent an undetermined time in a wall at the Acropolis before being recovered and then cut in two by Elgin's men in situ, sank when the brig *Mentor* went down in a storm off the coast of the island Kythira south-east of the Peloponnese on September 17, 1802. The cargo, which contained other elements from the Parthenon as well as four slabs from the frieze of the Nike Apteros temple, was salvaged during that fall and winter under Hamilton's firm direction, at a time the Mediterranean was heavily militarized.³⁴ Having spent months in the Ionian Sea, these pieces are now part of what we're looking at in the Duveen Gallery. The whole collection was sandbagged during World War I, and from 1940 they spent eight years underground, in the air-raid shelter in the tunnels of the Aldwych tube station on the Strand.

Gleditsch's images capture interesting stains on the stone, as well as erased faces, missing body parts and bodies completely gone, fractures and fissures, corrosion from biological attacks, open and closed pores in the stone, weathered erosion of the marble grain, rubbed surfaces destroyed by exposure to wind and rain, Victorian scrubbing, traces of rasp and claw chisels, high polishes as well as smoothed, unpolished surfaces, unnaturally smooth parts, traces of dirt and of protective coat applied in 1970 and reminiscences of other coatings, a variety of contrasts between cleaned and uncleaned parts, and other marks on the stone – as also forensically demonstrated by the Parthenon expert Ian Jenkins.³⁵ Yet, the iron-colored discoloration that stand out in the photos, is a quality of the marble itself carved from the quarries at the south slopes of Mount Pentelikon, northeast of Athens. Weathered Pentelic marble is not uniform in color. Iron particles cause the stone's particular hue when exposed to air, acquiring the characteristic honey-color and occasionally iron-flushed spots. Its golden shade in brownish yellow is distinctly different from the many kinds of snow-white Italian marble that shaped the aesthetic sensibility

of European modernity. Yet, freshly cut, also Pentelic marble appears bright white, as presently demonstrated in Athens, where the Acropolis Restoration Service and an enormous influx of fresh Pentelic marble over the last decades has turned the Parthenon into something closer to a construction site than a restoration project. The dazzling whiteness of the stone that also in antiquity arrived straight from the quarries, became part of the evidence of the painting of the temple in the early 19th century: The lavish visual intricacy of the sculpted frieze would simply not have been legible from the ground: «the minutiaë of the work in many parts would have been lost to the eye amidst the general brilliancy.»³⁶

Gleditsch's series brings forth the lack of uniform surface to the London collection, and one could add that neither in London nor in Athens there is anything resembling original surfaces to bemoan. And there is no nostalgia, no lament, no moaning expressed in these images. Distortions, chromatic misrepresentations, instability, accidents, and the erratic trajectories of works of art and architecture is often at stake in Gleditsch's work, as when he in *Polymorphous Magical Substance* (2017) used an obsolete photographic format, the unique polaroid photograph, to abstract the colors of original and restored interiors by modernist architects such as Le Corbusier, Eileen Grey, Mies van der Rohe, and Arne Korsmo. In *The Large Glass, a Close Reading* (2016) he dealt photographically with the bewildering provenance of the two replicas of Duchamp's *La Mariée mise à nue par ses célibataires même* (1915–1923) in the collection of Moderna Museet, Stockholm. In *White Lies* (2015) he turned to sculpture to investigate the original color schemes from the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart, 1927 and the exhibition's photographic reception history.

The Elgin Marbles have been subjected to changing ideals of preservation, restoration, and display. They are truly historical. Their historicity is part of their power and beauty. The provenance of the British Parthenon collection is forever tied to the names Elgin and Duveen, and this will remain the case if and when the collection is returned to Athens. The British Museum upset both the Greeks and the British Government when sending, during the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1854, the god Illissos to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, as «a marble ambassador of a European ideal.»³⁷ This is the only time a part of the British Parthenon collection has ever left London. The fall of 2022 will reveal what the British Museum envisions with the novel diplomatic phrase «an active Parthenon Partnership.»³⁸

Espen Gleditsch's unbiased registration of trauma, accidents, and accidental events in the career of the Parthenon marbles prompts us to take a closer look at the marbles at yet another critical moment in their adventurous life.

NOTES

1. The debate, as well as Elgin's statements and E.Q. Visconti's catalogue of the collection from 1815, commissioned by Elgin, is documented in *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Earl of Elgin's Collection of Sculptured Marbles; &c* (London: John Murray, 1816). Visconti was the curator of antiquities at the Louvre (Musée Napoleon), the former conservator of the Vatican collections and Capitoline Museum in Rome, and he relocated to Paris in 1799 with Napoleon's war booty.
2. Boris Johnson, «Elgin goes to Athens – The President marbles at the Grandeur that was (in) Greece,» *Debate*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1986.
3. Helena Smith, «Boris Johnson rules out return of Parthenon Marbles to Greece,» *The Guardian*, March 12, 2021.
4. The debate of May 5, 2002 is referred at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk>. Tim Loughton, Member of Parliament (C), column 777.
5. Edward O'Hara, *ibid.*, column 774.
6. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/03/08/george-clooney-wades-into-parthenon-marbles-debateagain>
7. «The Robot Guerilla Campaign to Recreate the Elgin Marbles,» *New York Times*, July 8, 2022.
8. «The New Acropolis Museum. International Competition,» (Athens: Ministry of Culture, Directorate of Museum Studies, 1989), 21–23.
9. Nicolai Ouroussoff, «Where Gods Yearn for Long-Lost Treasures,» *The New York Times*, October 28, 2007.
10. Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. A Romaunt*, canto II, XI–XII (London: John Murray, 1812).
11. *Description of the Collection of the Ancient Marbles in the British Museum; with Engravings*, part VII (London: W. Nicol, 1835), 20.
12. «Uniting Greece's heritage. The case for returning the Elgin Marbles to Athens has become compelling,» *The Times*, January 12, 2022.
13. Letter from Canova to Lord Elgin, dated London November 10, 1815. Printed in English translation as appendix No. 8 in *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons*.
14. This license was printed in English translation as appendix no. 10 in *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons* (1816), xxiv–xxvi.
15. A.H. Smith, «Lord Elgin and his Collection,» *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, vol. 36 (1916), 179.
16. Lusieri, report to Elgin, September 16, 1802, quoted from A.H. Smith, «Lord Elgin and his Collection,» *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, vol. 36 (1916), 233
17. *Description of the Collection of the Ancient Marbles in the British Museum*, 25
18. A.H. Smith, «Lord Elgin and his Collection,» *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, vol. 36 (1916): 315.
19. *Ibid.*, 173.
20. Ian Jenkins, «Acquisition and Supply of Casts from the Parthenon Sculptures from the British Museum, 1835–1939,» *Annual of the British School at Athens*, vol. 85 (1990): 89.
21. The Earl of Elgin interviewed by the Select Committee, February 29, 1815. In *Report*, 40.
22. «Additions to the British Museum,» *Illustrated London News*, March 8 (1845): 156.
23. «The Parthenon Frieze: Effects of a Century of Decay,» *Illustrated London News*, May 18 (1929), 839–41.
24. Ian Jenkins, *Cleaning and Controversy: The Parthenon Sculptures 1811–1939* (London: The British Museum, 2001), 4.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Robert Anderson, «Foreword,» in Jenkins, *Cleaning and Controversy*.
27. The reports, minutes from meetings, memos, museum correspondence, and extracts from newspaper articles, are printed as appendixes in *Ibid.*, 35–56.
28. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), 20.
29. J.J. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2006), 195.
30. «Report of the committee appointed to examine the Elgin Marbles in order to ascertain any evidences remain as to the employment of color in the decoration of the architecture or sculpture,» *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects of London*, vol. 1, part 2 (London, 1942), 103–104.
31. Owen Jones, *An Apology for the Colouring of the Greek Court*, Crystal Palace Library (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1854), 7–9. The book was for sale at the Crystal Palace, and included the first English translation of Semper's «On the Origin of Polychromy in Architecture.»
32. Jones, *An Apology*, 5.
33. George Scharf, Jun., *The Greek Court Erected in the Crystal Palace, by Owen Jones*, Crystal Palace Library (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1854), 93.
34. This absolute thriller is puzzled together by letters, receipts, Hamilton's drawings for the salvage operation, and other documents in Smith, «Lord Elgin and his Collection,» 240–254.
35. See «7 An evaluation of the evidence» and «The surface condition of the Parthenon Marbles,» in Jenkins, *Cleaning and Controversy*, 20–32.
36. R.I.B.A.'s «Report of the committee appointed to examine the Elgin Marbles,» 104.
37. «Amid Sanctions, British Museum lends Russia controversial Elgin Marble.» *CNN World*, December 5, 2014. <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/05/world/europe/uk-elgin-marbles-russia/index.html>
38. Sarah Baxter, «Why the Elgin Marbles may finally return to Greece,» *The Sunday Times*, July 30, 2022.