

La Corona was mysterious Mayan City

While some of you might think that it is a Mexican beer, researchers have established that La Corona is a Mayan city, known as 'Site Q' to archaeologists.

A sculpture recently discovered at the La Corona ruins confirms the location of Site Q in the jungles north of Guatemala.

The Mayan city and its splendid artworks have fascinated historians and art collectors because of the mystery surrounding its location. Several stone sculptures have been appearing since the 70s, with the head of snakes bearing a recurrent element. Scientists speculated that they came from a single Mayan city, known as Site Q. An international team from Yale University and the National Geographic society, etc. are excavating the La Corona site, situated inside the Laguna del Tigre national park.



The Mayan civilization of Mesoamerican Indians reached its height around A.D. 300 and 900, with populations inhabiting Southeast Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. The Mayans built more cities than did ancient Egypt. They are known for their architecture and city planning, mathematics and hieroglyph.

Paul Klee Zentrum in Switzerland

Switzerland dragged its feet for a while in giving due recognition to its native son, but finally on 20th June, 2005, the Zentrum Paul Klee museum was opened in Bern. The world-renown artist Paul Klee, who passed away in 1940 without receiving the Swiss naturalization that he had applied for, is now honoured with one of the biggest collections of any artist – the museum houses 4,000 of his works of art.

Zentrum Paul Klee was designed by Kenzo Piano, who recently worked on Japan's Kansai airport in Osaka. There are also a music hall with 300 seats, a children's museum, workshop room, and a summer academy for young artists.

Born in Bern in 1879, Klee moved to Germany, and lived there. He returned to Switzerland after

the Nazis took power in 1933. His abstract and expressionist art was considered 'decadent', and his works in German museums were confiscated.

Klee was part of the Bauhaus art movement which influenced architecture and design between 1919 and 1933. He was also involved in upbeat pointillist mosaic paintings, spreading colours across the surface as dots. Characteristic elements in several of his works are the sun, moon and stars. His 1914 trip to Tunisia inspired a series of water colours that contributed to the modern movement. Unlike many artists, Klee became more prolific as he grew older; he made over 1,200 paintings in the last year of his life. A late flourish.

New Age Singapore Library

Singapore opened a new hightech-savvy library, built at the cost of over US\$125,000 with avant-

garde architecture and top rate facilities. Located in the Bugis district, which was once a well-known red-light area, the library provides free membership for Singapore citizens, and aims to promote the habit of reading particularly among those brought up on a diet of pop and digital culture. It holds over 600,000 items, with reference materials relating to Southeast Asia stored in printed and digital formats.

Computer kiosks are situated in strategic parts of the building for searches and enquiries. Reading areas receive natural lighting, and sofas are lined along glass walls, offering views of outdoor gardens.

The library is another addition to the range of libraries in the island city that offer more than just books. Many of these libraries contain cafes, exhibitions, providing talks and multimedia resources for a more entertaining experience. Figures support the view that Singapore is having success in its efforts to make libraries compete with shopping malls for attention of the young. Over 46 percent of new library registrations in 2003 and 2004 are users between the age of 7 and 19, according to the National Library Board. The government of Thailand recently discussed the possibility of putting religious places of worship inside shopping complexes as a way to attract the young, a proposal which generated controversy (the potent mixing of religions with consumerism). Certainly, the idea of having trendy libraries, instead, in shopping centres is worth studying as a better option to draw youths toward more constructive activities.

Chinese art in demand

The *Asian Wall Street Journal* reported that the most important measures of the state of the market in the art world are the Impressionist, Contemporary, Post-War and Modern auctions in autumn. It said that dealers, collectors and auction houses could find early indicators in an auction of fine Chinese ceramics and works of art at Christie's International PLC in New York. With new sale records reported, the auction totalled US\$14.5 million. A 'Wang Meng' (ca. 1309-1385) hanging scroll, 'Fishing in green depths' fetched

\$1.7 million (estimated at between \$700,000 and \$900,000); a blue-and-white Persian-inscribed vase (1506-1521) was sold at \$1.7 million, a price way over its estimate (\$100,000-\$150,000); and an imperial lacquer screen went for \$352,000 (it was estimated at \$50,000). The indications are that the Chinese art market will, from the last few seasons, continue its progress toward the high end in terms of sale of fine Chinese ceramics and works of art. It seems that it is not only cheap-labour Chinese products that are in great demand.

A rare porcelin vase dating from the Qing Dynasty of China was auctioned off at a world record of HK\$115.48 million, *AP* reported in Hong Kong. The small vase (16.5cm in height) from the reign (1736-1795) of emperor Qianlong (Great Wall) is decorated with pheasants on a flowering branch. It becomes the most expensive work of art sold at an auction in Asia.

Google yields ancient find

Luca Mori, an Italian computer programmer, was looking at Google Earth maps when he noticed unusual rectangular shapes on satellite images of his local area.

He contacted experts in Parma, and after excavation of ceramic pieces from the site, a farm land, archaeologists confirmed that a Roman villa was once located there. The *Daily Telegraph* quoted Mr. Mori saying that 'it was a Roman villa built some time just before the birth of Christ'.

Google Earth is a service offered by the Google search engine to provide users satellite imagery and maps of almost anywhere in the world. Now it seems you can do Googlearchaeology right at home.

'Shoeciology' or just very old shoes?

According to an anthropologist, rugged shoes were first used by humans between 40,000 and 26,000 years ago. Erik Trinkaus, who studied early human bones, said that humans' small toes became weaker during this period, due to the use of shoes. He concluded that sturdy shoes reduced the need for toes to be strong and flexible for gripping and balancing.

As far back as 500,000 years ago, humans may have started protecting their feet in the cold climate, but footwear relative to shoes used today is considered as a more recent invention.



Professor Trinkaus determined the time shoes came into common use, by studying the foot bones of *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals from between 10,000 to 100,000 years ago. It was found that shoe-wearing humans might have weaker toes because of less stress on them, and that humans began to wear shoes during an era when human behaviour changed dramatically, amidst notable advances.

Meanwhile, archaeologists have recently discovered what they reckoned is the oldest shoe in Britain. The 30cm-long shoe, dating about 2,000 years ago, was found in a tree trunk in southwest England. It is in good condition because it was preserved by waterlogging, as the tree trunk was in a timber-built well (dated 700BC to 43AD). Experts are examining the leather shoe for a thorough analysis.

4,000 year-old noodles

Most of us are, understandably, more familiar with spaghetti carbonara than with wantan mee, and rarely bothered about the origin of noodles. For ages, the Chinese, Italians and Arabs have been claiming the invention of noodles. Now, the issue may be settled with a recent discovery at the Lajia archaeological site on the Yellow River, China.

Yellow strands measuring 50cm were found in a pot that might have been buried during a flood. Radiocarbon dating of the material put it at approximately 4,000 years old.

Scientists said that the food was made of grains from millet grass, and its discovery indicated that noodles were originally created in China.

It was reported that the ancient settlement at Lajia had been hit by a sudden catastrophe, a

massive earthquake followed by floods. Human remains in various unusual postures were found, indicating that they died from a disaster.

A professor said that a “unique combination of factors” created a vacuum within the upturned earthenware bowl which preserved the noodles.

Go Directly to Prison?

A new board game that was inspired by the sensational robbery of the famous painting, ‘The Scream’, has drawn controversy. The Munch museum in Oslo, Norway, where the heist took place in August 2004, is selling the game in its gift shop, and has defended it as an educational and innocent game for children. There has been criticism that the game, ‘The Mystery of the Scream’, trivialises the thief of Norwegian artist Edvard Munch’s paintings - ‘The Scream’ and ‘Madonna’ were taken off the museum walls by two armed and hooded robbers as shocked visitors watched, flabbergasted. The art works, estimated at US\$100 million, were hauled away in a stolen car, and have not been seen again. Wonder if the robbers might consider buying the game for their children.

Star-gazing in China

The Chinese have been looking the stars for a long time too. Archaeologists discovered an ancient observatory in Shanxi, China. State media reported on October 30, 2005 that it is more than 4,000 years old. The remains are in the shape of a semi-circle (for the observation platform), and an outer circle.

It is believed that in the past, observers studied the direction of sunrise through the gaps between thirteen stone pillars that originally stood on the base of the inner circle.

Gallery of modern Burmese art

A beautifully-designed art gallery opened, in October, along the Yangon river, Myanmar. Known as River Gallery, it is located in the Strand Hotel, and is owned by Gill Pattison. The gallery exhibits the works of contemporary Burmese artists, many of whom usually showed their art in small galleries and studios.

The excellent and exquisite River Gallery provides the space for contemporary Burmese art to be displayed and appreciated by locals, visitors, collectors and enthusiasts. The current exhibition offers a view of the modern art of Myanmar, and features 28 artists and more than 80 works, including those of Nann Nann and Aye Nyein Myint (two female artists) and Zaw Win Pe, who depicts scenes (after the rainy season) of Upper Shan State; Nyein Chan Su (aka NCS); Kyee Myin Saw (who participated in the art event 'Identities vs Globalisation' in Chiang Mai last year; Tin Win; Tin Maung Ooi and Zaw Zaw Aung.

Likay museum

Thailand may have its first Likay museum as part of efforts to preserve the performing art tradition. Likay is a dramatic art form that includes dances, story plots, songs, comedy and the spectacle of brilliant costumes. It is popular at temple and village festivals, especially in the south of the country.

Residents of Mahakan community in Bangkok proposed the museum project which has been approved with a budget allocation by the Culture Ministry. The museum will also hold Likay performances for public entertainment. It is believed that historical documents prove that the first public Likay theatre was built in the Mahakan Fort area.

Cambodian music fest

The recently-concluded Phnom Penh Music Festival in Cambodia offered both traditional Khmer and Western classical music. Based on the theme of 'East-West Dialogue', Cambodian musicians, guests from Thailand and Vietnam, and European groups, among others, were invited to perform. The organisers, Foundation for the Advancement of Western Classical Performing Arts (FWCPA) aimed to foster cross-cultural learning and exchange between Asian and Western musicians through concerts which were held during six days.

However, the festival, second in the series, was again patronised mostly by Westerners and Japa-

nese. The cost of the tickets at about US\$10 for adults and US\$2 for students might have been too prohibitive for the locals. Also missing were workshops and public lectures in a departure from last year's event. FWCPA is striving to improve the festival, and the third to be organised in 2006 will be a tribute to the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Pompeii silverware set saved from volcano disaster

A set of ancient silverware has been recovered from the Roman city, Pompeii, which was destroyed by a volcanic eruption 2,000 years ago.

Hand-made goblets, plates and trays were found in a wicker basket that probably had been carried by a resident escaping the city as Mount Vesuvius exploded in AD 79. Thousands fled Pompeii, with whatever possessions they could save, from the volcanic spew of ash and mud.

Pompeii is regarded as the world's first scientifically excavated archaeological site, and the remains of about 2,000 inhabitants have been dug up. The city is calculated to have had a population of between 10,000 and 15,000.

The individual, who had gathered the tableware into a wicker basket, hid it in a stairwell in public baths on the outskirts of the city before being overcome by fumes.

Archaeologists inspecting the building of a new motorway near Pompeii unearthed the silverware found next to the skeleton of a man.

The wicker basket and the silver set, dug up five years ago, were preserved in ash and mud, in a solid block. Experts used the latest archaeological techniques, including x-ray, to cut away the heavy encrustations. Archaeologists skillfully separated and retrieved the twenty pieces. The remains, including exquisitely engraved wine cups, a set of small dishes, a spoon, plus fine silver trays for appetizers, are currently being treated with chemicals to preserve the vegetable fibre and shall be on display for public view in due course.