

THREADS OF HERITAGE

Down the Rabbit Hole of Art Crime

Produced by Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia
(Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology) & No Panic Agency

Directed by Brian Parodi

Production Manager Fabio Beltotto

Creative Producer Valentina Logli

Screenplay Fabio Beltotto, Michela De Bernardin

Duration 45'

Voice over Massimo Veracini

Original music by Francesco Bacci

Media Partner The Journal of Cultural Heritage Crime

The documentary *Threads of Heritage* offers an unprecedented look at the **illicit trafficking of cultural heritage**—a crisis that threatens historical treasures worldwide. Through compelling storytelling and firsthand accounts, the film explores the irreversible damage caused by **clandestine excavations** and the **illegal art market**, exposing the intricate network of interests that often involves traffickers, auction houses, and major international museums.

A journey through **Rome**, **Cerveteri** and **Madrid** takes the audience to the heart of this phenomenon, from looted archaeological sites to museum storage facilities inaccessible to the public, where hundreds of artefacts await reassignment. For the first time, these objects become the protagonists of a narrative that restores their intrinsic historical and cultural value.

With the support of experts and industry professionals, the documentary features the testimonies of **Vincenzo Bellelli**, Director of the Cerveteri Archaeological Park; **Luana Toniolo**, Director of the National Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia; and **Arianna Traviglia**, Director of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology (Italian Institute of Technology). Crucial contributions also come from law enforcement agencies dedicated to protecting cultural heritage: the **Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage** and the **Brigada de Patrimonio Histórico** of the Spanish National Police take the audience into the core of their operations, conducted in collaboration with other European police forces, to combat a black market worth millions of euros.

Former archaeological officials **Maurizio Pellegrini** and **Daniela Rizzo**, along with former judge **Giuglielmo Muntoni** reconstruct some of the most emblematic legal cases linked to the illicit trafficking of cultural goods. These include cases involving **Giacomo Medici** and **Robert Emanuel Hecht**, both renowned international art dealers, as well as **Marion True**, former curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum. Former Italian Minister of Culture **Francesco Rutelli** shifts the focus to restitutions, highlighting the diplomatic tools used to facilitate the return of looted artworks to their countries of origin and emphasising the key role of international cooperation.

A particularly innovative aspect of the documentary is its exploration of emerging technologies applied to the fight against illicit trafficking. From outer space to the depths of the web, **Alessandra Ussorio**, Capability Development Coordinator at the **European Union Satellite Centre (SatCen)**, explains how satellite imagery analysis aids in monitoring archaeological sites. Meanwhile, the **Carabinieri TPC** introduce the groundbreaking **SWOADS software**, an AI-powered tool that accelerates the identification of illicit goods on e-commerce platforms and in online catalogues of galleries and auction houses.

The documentary concludes with a focus on **RITHMS**, a software system currently under development as part of the **Research, Intelligence, and Technology for Heritage and Market Security** project, coordinated by the **Italian Institute of Technology**. This cutting-edge digital platform integrates data from various sources and uses **Social Network Analysis** to detect and visualise potential criminal networks involved in cultural heritage trafficking. With RITHMS, law enforcement agencies will have a powerful tool to map and analyse links between individuals, artefacts, and suspicious transactions, enhancing their ability to combat and prevent this global issue.

The documentary was produced within the framework of the European project **RITHMS**, funded by the **Horizon Europe** program (Grant Agreement No. 101073932). **Threads of Heritage** aims to increase public and institutional consciousness about the importance of safeguarding cultural assets from looting and exploitation as part of a broader strategy to raise awareness about cultural heritage protection.

The screenplay, written by **Fabio Beltotto** and **Michela De Bernardin**, presents a detailed and critical exploration of illicit cultural heritage trafficking, offering a fresh perspective. Under the direction of **Brian Parodi**, this narrative is transformed into a visually compelling experience that informs and deeply moves the audience.

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