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QUALIFICATIONS
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ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
Credit Level
Reading
Text

Read carefully the passage overleaf. It will help if you read it twice. When you have done so, answer the questions. Use the spaces provided in the Question/Answer booklet.



This passage is taken from the introduction to a book about how we make quick decisions about important things.



The Statue That Didn't Look Right

- 1 In September of 1983, an art dealer by the name of Gianfranco Becchina approached the J. Paul Getty Museum in California. He had in his possession, he said, a marble statue dating from the sixth century BC. It was what is known as a kouros – a sculpture of a male youth standing with his left leg forward and his arms at his sides. There are only about two hundred kouros in existence, and most have been recovered badly damaged or in fragments from grave sites or archaeological digs. But this one was almost perfectly preserved. It stood close to seven feet tall. It had a kind of light-coloured glow that set it apart from other ancient works. It was an extraordinary find. Becchina's asking price was just under \$10 million.
- 2 The Getty moved cautiously. It took the kouros on loan and began a thorough investigation. Was the statue consistent with other known kouros? The answer appeared to be yes. Where and when had the statue been found? No one knew precisely, but Becchina gave the Getty's legal department a sheaf of documents relating to its more recent history.
- 3 A geologist from the University of California named Stanley Margolis came to the museum and spent two days examining the surface of the statue with a high-resolution stereomicroscope. He then removed a core sample from just below the right knee and analysed it using an electron microscope, electron microprobe, mass spectrometry, X-ray diffraction, and X-ray fluorescence. The statue was made of dolomite marble from the ancient Cape Vathy quarry on the island of Thasos, Margolis concluded, and the surface of the statue was covered in a thin layer of calcite — which was significant, Margolis told the Getty, because dolomite can turn into calcite only over the course of hundreds, if not thousands, of years. In other words, the statue was old. It wasn't some contemporary fake.
- 4 The Getty was satisfied. Fourteen months after their investigation of the kouros began, they agreed to buy the statue. In the autumn of 1986, it went on display for the first time. The *New York Times* marked the occasion with a front-page story.
- 5 However, the kouros had a problem. It didn't look right. The first to point this out was an Italian art historian named Federico Zeri. When Zeri was taken down to the museum's restoration studio to see the kouros in December of 1983, he stared at the sculpture's fingernails. In a way he couldn't immediately articulate, they seemed wrong to him. Evelyn Harrison was next. She was one of the world's foremost experts on Greek sculpture, and she was in Los Angeles visiting the Getty. "Arthur Houghton, who was then the curator, took us down to see it," Harrison remembers. "He swished the cloth off the top of it and said,

‘Well, it isn’t ours yet, but it will be in a couple of weeks.’ And I said, ‘I’m sorry to hear that.’” What did Harrison see? She didn’t know. In that very first moment, when Houghton swished off the cloth, all Harrison had was a hunch, an instinctive sense that something was amiss. A few months later, Houghton took Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, to see the statue. Hoving always makes a note of the first word that goes through his head when he sees something new, and he’ll never forget what that word was when he first saw the kouros. “It was ‘fresh’ – ‘fresh,’” Hoving recalls. And “fresh” was not the right reaction to have to a two-thousand-year-old statue. Later, thinking back on that moment, Hoving realized why that thought had popped into his mind: “I had dug in Sicily, where we found bits and pieces of these things. They just don’t come out looking like that. The kouros looked like it had been dipped in the very best caffè latte from Starbucks.”

6 Hoving turned to Houghton. “Have you paid for this?”

7 Houghton, Hoving remembers, looked stunned.

8 “If you have, try to get your money back,” Hoving said. “If you haven’t, don’t.”

9 The Getty was getting worried, so they convened a special symposium on the kouros in Greece. They wrapped the statue up, shipped it to Athens, and invited the country’s most senior sculpture experts. This time the chorus of dismay was even louder.

10 Georgios Dontas, head of the Archaeological Society in Athens, saw the statue and immediately felt cold. “When I saw the kouros for the first time,” he said, “I felt as though there was a glass between me and the work.” Another expert thought it was a fake. Why? Because when he first laid eyes on it, he said, he felt a wave of “intuitive repulsion.” By the time the symposium was over, the consensus among many of the attendees appeared to be that the kouros was not at all what it was supposed to be. The Getty, with its lawyers and scientists and months of painstaking investigation, had come to one conclusion, and some of the world’s foremost experts in Greek sculpture — just by looking at the statue and sensing their own “intuitive repulsion” — had come to another. Who was right?

11 For a time it wasn’t clear. But then, bit by bit, the Getty’s case began to fall apart. The letters the Getty’s lawyers used to carefully trace the kouros, turned out to be fakes. And what of the scientific analysis that said that the surface of the Getty kouros could only have aged over many hundreds or thousands of years? Well, it turns out things weren’t that cut and dried. Upon further analysis, another geologist concluded that it might be possible to “age” the surface of a dolomite marble statue in a couple of months using potato mould. In the Getty’s catalogue, there is a picture of the kouros, with the notation “About 530 BC, or modern forgery.”

12 When Federico Zeri and Evelyn Harrison and Thomas Hoving and Georgias Dontas — and all the others — looked at the kouros and felt an “intuitive repulsion,” they were absolutely right. In the first two seconds of looking — in a single glance — they were able to understand more about the essence of the statue than the team at the Getty was able to understand after fourteen months. They simply took a look at that statue and some part of their brain did a series of instant calculations, and before any kind of conscious thought took place, they *felt* something. For Thomas Hoving, it was the completely inappropriate word “fresh” that suddenly popped into his head. In the case of one expert, it was a wave of “intuitive repulsion.” For Georgios Dontas, it was the feeling that there was a glass between him and the work. Did they know why they knew? Not at all. But they *knew*.

- 13 The part of our brain that leaps to conclusions like this is called the adaptive unconscious, and the study of this kind of decision making is one of the most important new fields in psychology.
- 14 Whenever we meet someone for the first time, whenever we interview someone for a job, whenever we react to a new idea, whenever we're faced with making a decision quickly and under stress, we use the adaptive unconscious. How long, for example, does it take you to decide how good your teacher is? A class? Two classes? A term? The psychologist Nalini Ambady once gave students three ten-second videotapes of a teacher — with the sound turned off — and found they had no difficulty at all coming up with a rating of the teacher's effectiveness. Then Ambady cut the clips back to five seconds, and the ratings were the same. They were remarkably consistent even when she showed the students just *two* seconds of videotape. Then Ambady compared those snap judgements of teacher effectiveness with evaluations of those same teachers made by their students after a full term of classes, and she found that they were also essentially the same. A person watching a silent two-second video clip of a teacher he or she has never met will reach conclusions about how good that teacher is that are very similar to those of a student who has sat in the teacher's class for an entire term. That's the power of our adaptive unconscious.
- 15 You may have done the same thing, whether you realized it or not, when you first picked up this article. Aren't you curious about what happened in those two seconds?

Adapted from "Blink" by Malcolm Gladwell

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

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