

**ARTS & BOOKS****On Art awards, Stradivarius violins, a new beatles album-cum-show and Apocalypto's historical inaccuracies****Turner Prize 2006** By Elodie LECADIEU

The German painter Tomma Abts was awarded the Turner Prize on December 4, 2006 at Tate Britain, London. This prize, created in 1984, rewards a living British artist or an artist living in Britain for his/her work of the past year. It is one of the most sought-after art distinctions in Europe. Tomma Abts is the first woman (since Gillian Wearing in 1997) and the first painter (since Chris Ofili in 1998) to win it in almost a decade. She usually works on canvases of a single size, 19 in. by 15 in., painting sitting down.

Sources: "I'm sure they were thinking it was time a woman won," *The Guardian* 6 December 2006.  
[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk).

**The mystery of Stradivarius violins solved by a Texas scientist ?** By Eric GILLAUX

The mystery surrounding Stradivarius violins and the uniqueness of their sound has been baffling violinists and scientists alike for the last three centuries. A biochemist from Texas A&M University, Joseph Nagyvary, has recently discovered what could well be the answer to their questions. After experimenting with infrared and nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, he found out that the famous violins "had been treated with salts of copper, iron and chromium as wood preservers." Nagyvary published his entire study in *Nature* magazine. This could be good news for violinists around the world as Stradivarius's crystal clear sound is rather dear: one such violin costs anything up to 2 million dollars...

Source: "Wood in prized violins may have been chemically treated," *The Mirror* 29 November 2006.

**A new Beatles show cum album** By Marie-Dominique BEAU

The first authorised theatrical show of the Beatles' work will open at the Mirage in Las Vegas this summer. The current owner of the Beatles' catalogue, English record producer Giles Martin, and his father, Sir George Martin, famed producer of almost all of The Beatles' records, have agreed to use the original Beatles' recordings to provide a soundtrack for the Cirque du Soleil show entitled "Love". The project involved re-mixing and re-mastering of the Beatles' recorded performances into completely new music. This was initially George Harrison's idea. He wanted to organise a joint stage production with his friend Guy Laliberte, the founder of the Cirque du Soleil and originally a fire-breathing street performer. The surviving members of the group, Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr helped shape the show, but will not appear on stage.

Source: "Beatles will release new album to mark opening of Las Vegas extravaganza," [www.Telegraph.co.uk](http://www.Telegraph.co.uk) 10 December 2006.

**« Apocalypto »: a controversial fresco.** By Sébastien GERBAULT

Mel Gibson's latest movie, released in the US at the beginning of December, is a violent fresco on the decline of the ancient Mayan civilization. It is partially intended as a political allegory about civilizations in decline, and opens on a quote claiming that: "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within."

Anthropologists, archaeologists and historians, together with some descendants of the Mayan people, are not very keen on the way Mayans are depicted. Anachronisms and inaccuracies are rife, and scenes showing priests performing human sacrifices with graphic details about cannibalism have aroused controversy. Specialists such as John Arithson and Stanley Jones recall that the inhabitants of the Yucatan peninsula were a refined people, who knew about mathematics, writing, and astronomy. They deplore the confusion with the Aztecs. The dialogues are in Yucatek dialect.

Source: "Mel Gibson's 'Apocalypto': rape, torture, human sacrifice - and a thumbs-up," *The Independent* 10 December 06.