



5th October 2011

## Sir's not always right

Sir Simon Jenkins [says](#) a Tate Gallery restorer's repainting of one third of John Martin's flood-damaged "The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum" (from a Photoshop composite of an old photograph and another version of Martin's painting) is brilliant. He says that the ruins of Pompeii itself, having been largely destroyed when bombed by the RAF "as part of its casual assault on European civilisation" should now be reconstructed according to our idea of how they might have been originally. He says that we should no longer fret about making mistakes when reconstructing the past because "seeking to re-interpret, even reconstruct, some works of the past no longer need attract jeers of 'Disneyfication', and that too is preferable to terminal decay." Given that Sir Simon is chairman of the National Trust, these sentiments are alarming as well as wrong-headed: the past, or what remains of it, is not ours to remake on modern prejudices and fancies - and with an eye on the tourist trade. There have been signs enough that the commercial exploitation of history and its surviving artefacts is gaining the upperhand over an appropriate respect for the integrity and authenticity of what has survived - not to mention evidence of a declining recognition of our own cultural limitations in these matters.

Michael Daley

Printable PDF version of this article:

Comments may be left at: [artwatch.uk@gmail.com](mailto:artwatch.uk@gmail.com)

---



Above: Sir Simon Jenkins in the Guardian.

Click on the images above for larger versions. NOTE: zooming requires the [Adobe Flash Plug-in](#).