

RETURN

It doesn't belong in a museum.

It belongs to the people.

*Across the globe, there's unprecedented pressure mounting on museums to return **indispensable artifacts** taken from the people and cultures that created them.*

—George Richards

LOGLINE

In order to mend the bonds broken by the looting of ancient artifacts, ethnographer **George Richards** and technology expert **Otto Lowe** deploy cutting-edge technology and rare expertise to celebrate cultures in the most remote corners of the world.



It's about the **object** and the **story** it tells.

—Otto Lowe

OVERVIEW

Over the next couple of years a record number of **looted**, **stolen**, and **illicitly acquired** museum pieces will return to cultures around the world. To uncover the stories behind these objects George Richards and Otto Lowe will immerse themselves in the **rituals and daily life** of misunderstood people and their remote civilizations.

These adventures—exploring caves in **Somaliland**, jungles in **Colombia** and the rugged coast of **Easter Island**—will illuminate each artifact's story with a mix of mythical wonder and cultural loss. George maps out the intricate narratives behind the meaning of each object while Otto uses futuristic photo technology to produce museum-quality replicas. Some objects are the center of a crime drama, while others reflect shifts in accepted behavior by museums and collectors over the last 400 years.

Together, George and Otto celebrate each featured object and its culture of origin with a **culminating ceremony**. This puts the people they meet at center stage and turns up their voices so they can be heard over the noise of museum politics, conflicting opinions, and the cultural maze thrown up by the **RETURN** movement.





The movement is unstoppable.
—Achille Mbembe, philosopher



RETURN MOVEMENT

More than **90 percent** of African cultural property resides in museums outside of Africa, according to a 2020 report from the French government. In fact, in nearly every country on Earth, indigenous people are calling for the return of important artifacts. That's why last year, the British government pledged to return **5,000 artifacts** to Iraq alone—a drop in the bucket, say those who see a rising wave of repatriation efforts in the coming years.

Frontline champions of indigenous cultures are generating a global groundswell of support right now for the **repatriation of important artifacts.**





Otto Lowe is a fearless daredevil proponent of these technologies—in wild and dangerous settings.

—George Richards

THE CREW

GEORGE RICHARDS

George's work to document at-risk cultures takes him to war zones and other dangerous places. He's in the business of sustaining important pieces of cultural heritage, and that means George builds relationships with some of the most interesting characters in the world.

As director of **Community Jameel**, George leads international campaigns supporting indigenous people and their precious culture. He is fluent in several languages and a renowned antiquities specialist with access to places where the need is great and the risks are many.

OTTO LOWE

Otto leads replication teams to remote cultural sites, gathers the photo and digital data he needs, then brings it all to life with the crew in Madrid. He is the son of Adam Lowe, founder of **Factum Arte and the Factum Foundation**, the world's leading producer of art and artifact facsimiles.

JOINT EFFORT

If George is the James Bond of antiquities preservation, then Otto is his Q.

George's job is to reveal the important role specific artifacts play in expressing a **cultural identity**. He does this by **immersing himself** in traditional cultural experiences—weddings, funerals, rituals—and the everyday routines that define a people.

Otto is there to **3D record** important artifacts and sacred places using a **futuristic arsenal** of high-tech tools. He's joined by local artisans in a technology exchange as Otto learns ancient methods while training community members how to preserve their tangible history.

THE APPROACH

George and Otto bring humility and curiosity, relying on locals to identify the most important artifacts and cultural sites. The look is upbeat, the **pacing like a heist film**.





The feeling the people get from these objects is far and above what we feel. It's from the far ancient past, but there's this ineffable connection that kind of defies explanation. It is very powerful and should be celebrated.

—Otto Lowe

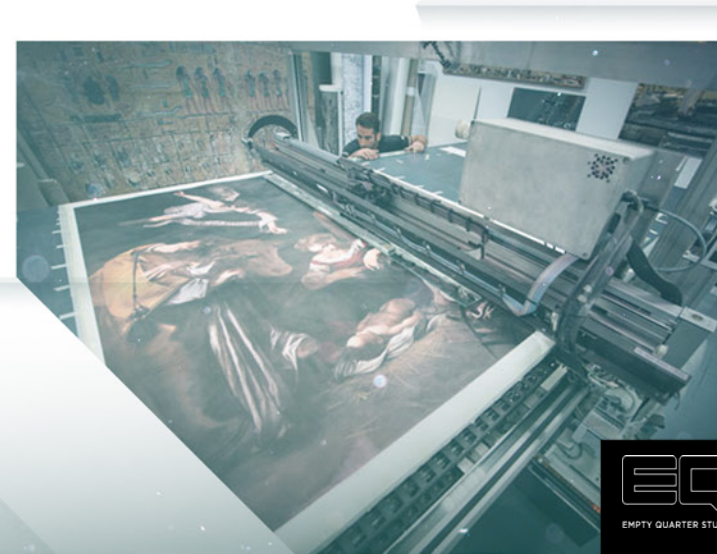
OTTO'S HEADQUARTERS

It's a **replica skunkworks** in Madrid where Otto uses data gathered in far-away places to create **first-class facsimiles**. It's specialized work and requires support from a team of hip, sharp-minded creators worthy of a profile in *Wired* magazine.

REPLICAS WORK

George and Otto draw on the expertise and wisdom of locals and create something genuine enough to display in **world-class museums**.

That sounds like a tall order—because **it is**.



KEEPERS OF CULTURAL FLAMES

SHAMAN ULDARICO

Introduces George to the home of the **cosmic jaguar**, depicted in ancient and threatened rock art, and accessed by sipping **sacred hallucinogenic tea**.



MYSOREAN CULTURE WARRIOR

Keeps memory of the great **Tipu Sultan** alive by allowing George to fire a **Mysorean rocket**, just like the homegrown weapons used to resist British colonization.



CARETAKER OF LAAS GEEL MUSA ABDI JAMA

Ventures with George into a remote desert oasis, where they feast on **Surbiyaan Hilib Adhi**, a lamb dish served to celebrate the end of the fasting season.



STORY STRUCTURE

A STORY: Open on *the heist*. Recount story behind artifact and set up central pass/fail question—should the real thing be returned? Or should it stay where it is?

Detail **why** the artifact is culturally important and **how** its return might impact specific people.

B STORY: Otto trains locals to digitally record important artifacts and sacred sites.

George goes in search of answers to key questions:

Why does this object matter?

Who are its rightful keepers?



STORY STRUCTURE (CONT'D)

Through in-the-moment experiences with locals and deep reflections from the people he meets, George uses the featured artifact as a magnifying glass for **examining traditions, customs and world views** that don't get much attention from the mainstream media.

Otto overcomes **technical challenges** and learns a few things from local artisans. The **digital data** he gathers can be turned into replica artifacts and other impressive simulations of reality.

George participates in a **culminating ceremony** or shared experience that brings his journey to a close.

Final scene gives pass/fail status report on the effort to **RETURN** or **not to RETURN** featured objects to their culture of origin.



SEASON 1 EXAMPLE EPISODES

EPISODE 101

INDIA: Will Tipu's Tiger roar again among the Mysore people?

CHALLENGE: Transforming wood and metal into a mechanical tiger.

When British soldiers sacked **Tipu Sultan's palace** in 1799, they looted many treasures, including **Tipu's Tiger**—a remarkable life-sized sculpture depicting a tiger with its teeth sunk in the neck of a British soldier. George acts as a go-between for the Mysoreans who want it returned from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Otto, meanwhile, hopes locals can help him source a block of native jackwood big enough to create an exact replica.



SEASON 1 EXAMPLE EPISODES

EPISODE 102

MEXICO: Returning a crystal skull to Mexico.

CHALLENGE: To rappel into Mayan cave in the Yucatan.

George and Otto go in search of the origin story for a **mysterious crystal skull** now held in the British Museum. Might it have once been part of a Mayan priest's burial treasures? Otto searches for the crystal he needs to craft a replica, while George participates in a **psychedelic ritual** with a shaman who says the experience will reveal the skull's importance to his people.



SEASON 1

EXAMPLE EPISODES

EPISODE 103

SOMALILAND: How ancient stone tools might help build a nation.

CHALLENGE: Travel to a war-torn place not recognized by the international community.

At the **Australian Museum** in Sydney, **there's a trove of important artifacts** and the people of Somaliland want them back. George and Otto explore how stone tools looted from the Jalelo settlement could be evidence that the true cradle of humanity is Somaliland, not neighboring Ethiopia. While Otto searches for the perfect local stone to create museum-worthy replicas, George explores the capital city Hargeisa. Then it's off to Sydney, where George negotiates the return of what could be **1.7 million-year-old tools**—some of the oldest ever discovered. It's a claim to fame Somalilanders want the rest of the world to heed.



SEASON 1 EXAMPLE EPISODES

EPISODE 104

AUSTRALIA: Boomeranging stolen relics back to Aboriginal ancestors.

CHALLENGE: Navigating the coastal jungle where Captain Cook looted aboriginal settlement.

Rodney Kelly, a descendent of an Aboriginal warrior shot by Captain Cook's party, is calling on **Berlin's Ethnological Museum** to return a **shield and spear** stolen by the infamous British explorer. He retraces Cook's plundering campaign through the Australian bush with George, while Otto teams up with Aboriginal artisans to create replicas.



SEASON 1 EXAMPLE EPISODES

EPISODE 105

EGYPT: Bring an early map of the stars back to the Temple of Hathor.

CHALLENGE: Return one of the largest treasures ever taken from Egypt.

The **Dendera Zodiac**, a ceiling relief containing ancient Egyptian pictures of the first Zodiac signs, was blasted out of the temple in Southern Egypt and taken to France in 1821. It is now in the ceiling of the Egyptian Antiquities exhibit at the **Louvre Museum** in Paris—but many are calling for its return, including archaeologist Monica Hanna. While Otto heads to the Louvre to 3D-scan the massive piece, George and Hanna explore the temple grounds and drill down on the significance of the missing zodiac.



SEASON 1 EXAMPLE EPISODES

EPISODE 106

EASTER ISLAND: Bring Hoa Hakananai'a home.

CHALLENGE: Make a risky beach landing in a rocky island cove.

The identity of Easter Islanders is intimately wrapped up in the island's iconic stone statues. Now native sculptor Benedicto Tuki is calling for the **British Museum** to return one of them known as **Hoa Hakananai'a**. It stands eight feet tall and weighs around four tons. And he's offering to give back an exact replica. Enter George and Otto, who follow Tuki to a spiritual place on the island and find a block of lava rock perfect for carving.



SEASON 2

EP. 201 — PERU: Resurrecting the lost statue of **Inca Emperor Pachacuti**.

EP. 202 — CHINA: It's time to restore all 12 **zodiac animal heads** to a statue used to keep time.

EP. 203 — ISRAEL: Using AI to reassemble **Biblical treasures**.

EP. 204 — GUATEMALA: Recreating a **Mayan Sun God mask**.

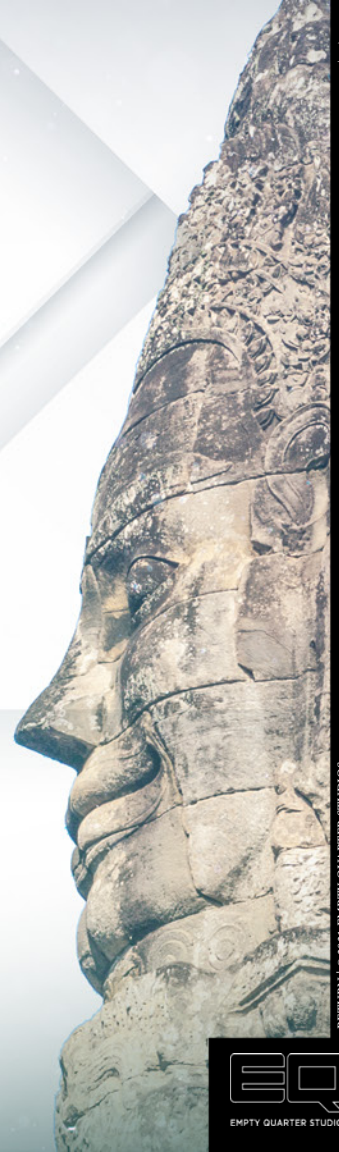
EP. 205 — SYRIA: Rematerializing the **Yalhi bin Yalhabouda statue** for safe viewing at the British Museum.

EP. 206 — ETHIOPIA: Ancient tablet with connection to **Ark of the Covenant** must come home.



EMPTY QUARTER STUDIOS

Based in New York and London, **Empty Quarter Studios** remains committed to crafting premium cinematic experiences, using moving images to tell epic, immersive and transformational stories borne out of exploration, travel, history, science and everyday life in the world's most exotic and misunderstood places.





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