

Frankenstein, Alba and Buddha: Is there an ethics of art?

You've heard of Frankenstein, but did you know that Alba was an albino rabbit with GFP genes that made her glow green under certain lights? Are living green rabbits an ethical use of art? The artist was trying to make a point about transgenic experiments and using art (and a rabbit) for that purpose. (Alba eventually died of old age but not from the green genes.) When art is destroyed during warfare, whether deliberately or accidentally, should it be restored or should we remember its destruction? Does the destruction of historic monuments disturb you as much as genocide? Should it? In the March issue of the Smithsonian Magazine, the feature article is called "Murdering History." Without reading it, the author's position on the ethics of destroying monuments should be clear.

And what about museums: do they have the right to display whatever they want even if it disturbs some visitors? Questions about ethics are never easy to answer; neither are questions about art. You do not need to be an art aficionado or know much of anything about art to be intrigued by these questions. Ethics and art have come together in many ways – in novels such as *Frankenstein* and *A Brave New World*, in the responses of congressmen (and women) to art works that challenge their beliefs about the government's role in the support of the arts, and in rabbits like Alba. This section of CORE202 will explore issues such as these as part of the larger project of examining forms of ethical reasoning. As in any of the sections of CORE202, you will become familiar with the important theories of ethical reasoning, but in contrast to the other sections, you will do this in the context of art.

