

ICONOCLASM AND THE OBJECTIVE ART HISTORIAN — THE CASE OF THE BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

Nice remark from Jack (Mitchell) about the Taliban's art criticism:

I quite agree with these remarks on the Taliban and their Stinger missiles (the instruments of their art criticism, if I recall correctly).

The fact remains, however, that if the Taliban genuinely believed in iconoclasm, and it seems they did believe in it, the one thing they can't be accused of is not taking Buddhist sculpture seriously. Who is more engaged with a piece of art, the historian who approaches it with an objectivity that amounts to nihilism or the barbarian who smashes it for the thrill of smashing an important object?

I don't mean this as a Futurist argument for burning the Louvre, but *both* the nihilist and barbarian motives seem (albeit unequally) to miss the mark, the

barbarian's because it's barbaric and the nihilist's because it results in an even greater detachment from beauty/reverence/etc. than that of the iconoclast.