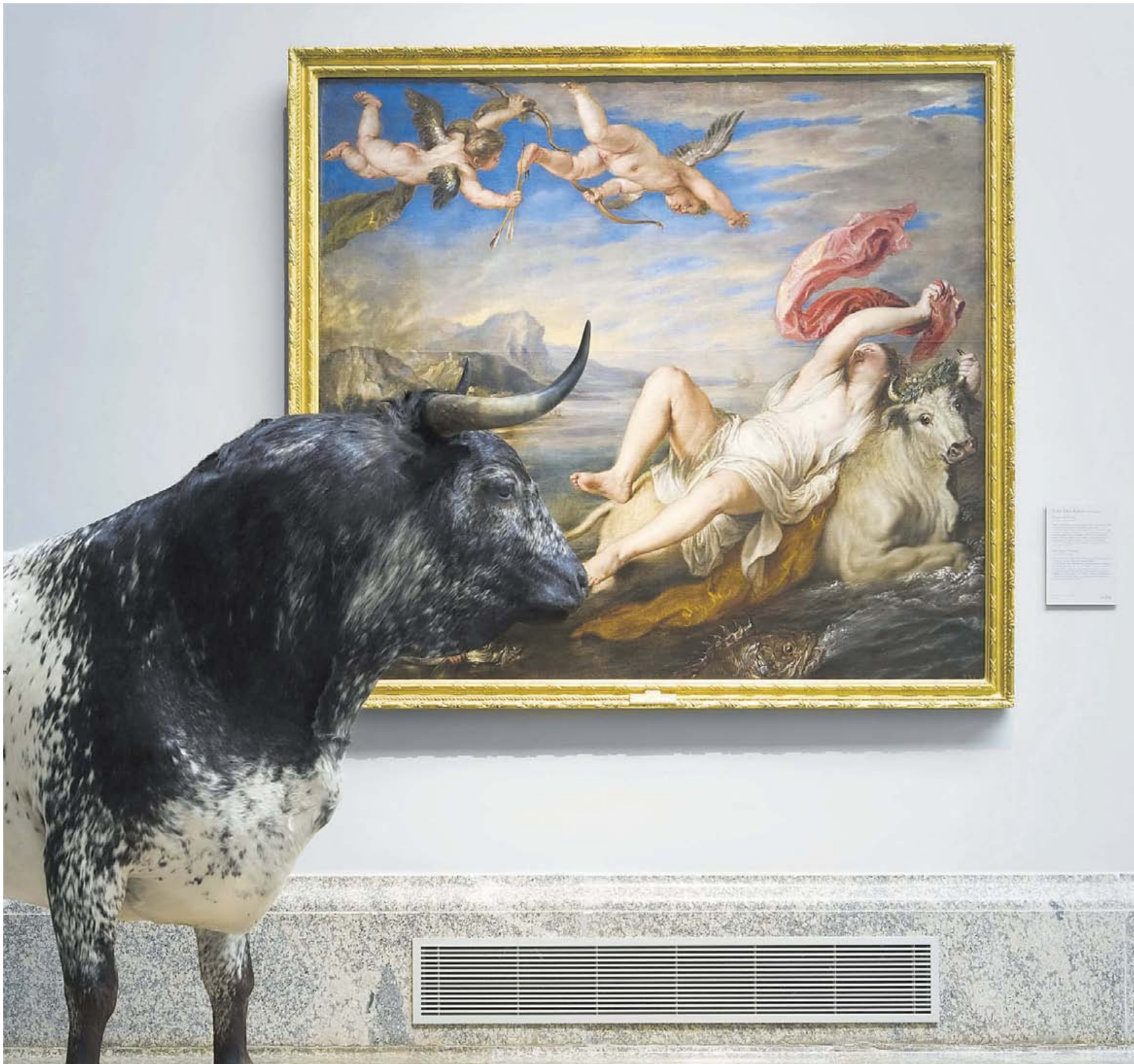


International



A stuffed bull appears to survey a Rubens while, below, a stuffed eagle swoops on a sculpture as the Prado returns to its roots Photograph: Pedro Martinez de Albornoz

Art and nature see eye to eye at the Prado

Paul Hamilos Madrid

A golden eagle looms menacingly over the entrance hall; a bull from the Duchy of Veragua stands majestically in front of a Rubens; a black mamba sits coiled up next to one of Goya's macabre black paintings.

These unexpected guests at the Prado form part of a new exhibition, opening later this month, that will show the gallery in Madrid returning to its roots as a natural history museum. In 1785, when King Charles III of Spain ordered the architect Juan de Villanueva to design the building that today houses the Prado, it was intended to show off the royal family's natural history cabinet. Only later, under his grandson, King Ferdinand VII, did it become the world-famous art gallery.

It was this history that Spanish artist Miguel Angel Blanco wanted to evoke by installing some of the finest objects from the National Museum of Natural Sciences alongside the gallery's more famous works. "It occurred to me that I could create a contemporary cabinet, an



'Dealing with artistic masterpieces, I had to bring masterpieces from natural history'

artistic intervention that also showed off the natural history in the paintings that hang in the Prado," he said.

Blanco spent three years investigating the collections of both museums, as well as those of the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Museum of the History of Pharmacy, and his own work, to select each piece and find a setting for them in the Prado. A perfectly preserved bull, for example, gazes at the bull in Rubens' *The Rape of Europa*, the artist's copy of a Titian. "But it also completely changes the setting of the hall, and the way you see the Prado."

The statue of the Emperor Tiberius, standing behind the bull, now appears to take on the aspect of a matador, rather than a master of ancient Rome. "And it seems as if the bull has always been here, it's perfectly integrated with the room. When you are dealing with artistic masterpieces, I had to bring masterpieces from natural history," said Blanco.

The 22 items, ranging from skeletons to stuffed birds and an Aztec mirror made from obsidian, are dotted around the Prado, setting off the stories told in

the paintings and sculptures which they accompany. Some dominate the room, others only catch the eye if you look up at the ceiling, where a dolphin might float over a statue of the goddess Venus.

"It was a great privilege for me to work with these beautiful pieces," said Blanco, whose own artwork is mostly about the natural world. "The exhibition will be here for six months, alongside the permanent collection, so I didn't want it to be too invasive. I want them to reflect and respect each other."

Thus a collection of meteorites, including the first ever to be discovered in Spain, sits next to Rubens' *The Birth of The Milky Way*. The painting depicts the divine origins of the universe, which, according to mythology, was created when Juno spread her breast milk throughout the galaxy.

In front of the *Concert of Birds* by Frans Snyders is a stuffed bird of paradise from Indonesia, accompanied by the sounds of birdsong. Blanco takes great delight in visitors to the gallery being distracted from the Rembrandt that hangs on the next wall by the bird calling out.

New Taliban chief ordered gun attack on Malala

Jon Boone Islamabad

A militant commander who ordered the murder of the schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai was chosen as the new head of the Pakistani Taliban yesterday.

The appointment of Mullah Fazlullah, a notorious hardliner committed to overthrowing the Pakistani state, will be greeted with dread by the government in Islamabad as it battles a deadly domestic insurgency.

It is also likely to quash any hopes of a negotiated peace deal with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which the government has been pushing for in recent months. "Peace talks with the government are not possible as Pakistan is not an authority and is under US slavery," said the TTP's acting leader, Asmatullah Shaheen Bhitani, according to local media.

The decision to select Fazlullah as leader of the TTP followed days of internal politicking within the movement following the death of its previous leader, Hakimullah Mehsud, in a drone strike last Friday.

Bhitani said Fazlullah had been given the job after unanimous agreement by TTP leaders. The decision was celebrated with sustained firing of machine guns in Miran Shah, a border town controlled by the TTP. Fazlullah, who is thought to be in his late 30s, is seen as extreme even by the standards of the movement he now leads. He led efforts to seize control of his native Swat, a few hours' drive north of Islamabad, and ran a shadow government from 2007 until the Pakistani military reas-

The appointment of Mullah Fazlullah, pictured on a video screen, is likely to quash hopes of a government peace deal



serted control in 2009. He imposed strict Islamic law on the residents and ordered his men to burn down music shops and prevent barbers from cutting beards.

He became known as Mullah Radio for his daily broadcasts when he would announce the name of men ordered to be beheaded for breaking the Taliban's strict rules. It was during this time that the young education activist Malala Yousafzai rose to prominence by writing an anonymous blog describing the terror of life under the Taliban. In October 2012, Fazlullah sent a gunman to kill Malala as she was travelling in a school van. She was shot in the head but survived, and now lives in the UK.

Perhaps most alarming for Pakistan is Fazlullah's success in setting up a base of operations in Kunar and Nuristan, provinces in eastern Afghanistan where the Kabul government has minimal control. If he stays in Afghanistan he will remain even further out of the reach of the Pakistani military than Mehsud, who ran the TTP from North Waziristan.

The lawless tribal region is in effect controlled by militant groups including the TTP, al-Qaida and Afghan insurgents, with US drones providing the only opposition to them.

The decision to appoint Fazlullah surprised some analysts who assumed the leadership would remain in the hands of a member of the Mehsud tribe, which has controlled the loose alliance of militant groups since it was created in 2007.

Umar Daraz Wazir, a journalist, said 46 out of 60 senior TTP figures who met on Saturday voted for Khan Said (Sajna), a member of the Mehsud tribe widely regarded as the favourite to take control. "But Fazlullah ultimately won because other commanders oppose Sajna's soft corner for the [Pakistani] government," said Wazir. Sajna was considered more inclined to consider peace talks with the government and to focus the TTP's efforts on attacking the western-supported government in Kabul.

Mohammad Amir Rana, a militancy expert in Islamabad, said: "If you look at the history of new heads of the TTP, each time they elect a more hardliner leader."

Fazlullah's appointment may also help to quell internal criticism within the movement that it is dominated by the Mehsud clan, Amir said. Pakistan is already braced for TTP reprisal attacks following Mehsud's killing.

Iranians lift hopes for early success in Geneva nuclear negotiations

Julian Borger Saeed Kamali Dehghan Geneva

Iranian and western officials could start drafting a nuclear agreement as early as this morning, Iran's foreign minister claimed at talks in Geneva.

"I think our colleagues are ready to start drafting. I think I can we can start working on some sort of joint statement," Mohammad Javad Zarif told CNN last night, adding: "It is possible to reach an understanding about an agreement before we close these talks tomorrow evening."

Zarif was speaking after the first day of a 48-hour meeting in the city between Iran and six global powers on its nuclear programme. Western officials agreed

that drafting work could begin today, but cautioned there were still many difficult issues to resolve.

Iranian officials said they thought the joint statement should include the outline of an initial partial agreement, as well as spelling out the goal of a long-term accord that would include agreed limits on Iran's nuclear programme and a normalisation of relations between the sanctions-hit country and the west.

The initial, partial agreement would be aimed at buying time for diplomacy rather than arriving at a comprehensive settlement breaking the international deadlock over Iran's nuclear programme, but it would nevertheless be a historic breakthrough.

Zarif said that the drafting of a joint

statement could start at a meeting this morning with Catherine Ashton, the EU foreign policy chief who is acting as convenor of the six-nation group, comprising the US, UK, France, Germany, Russia and China. Ashton will hold a breakfast meeting with senior diplomats from the group before seeing Zarif.

"The issues are on the table. We have dealt with the concerns of each side, and now we need to start drafting some sort of an agreement in a joint fashion," Zarif said. "I believe the ingredients are there. It will take a lot of effort and good faith and good will. I know we have it on our side ... There is an opportunity offered by the election of [Iran's moderate] President Rouhani and that it is an opportunity that has to be seized."

Zarif also said that Yukiya Amano, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, would visit Tehran on Monday, raising expectations of a breakthrough in long-running talks between Iran and the IAEA aimed at clearing up uncertainty over Iran's past development work on nuclear weapons.

Zarif said: "Mr Amano's visit is going to be an important indication that we are in the process of moving forward."

In Geneva, a senior US official, speaking before the talks began, held out the possibility of a limited relaxation of sanctions. He said: "In response to a first step agreed to by Iran that halts their [nuclear] programme from advancing further, we are prepared to offer limited, targeted, and reversible sanctions relief."