

ArtWatch UK on Burrell Bid to Over-turn Terms of Bequest:

(<http://artwatchuk.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/6-september-2013/>)

“6 – 8 September 2013

Protecting the Burrell Collection ~ A Blast against Risk-Deniers

In a remarkable development the National Gallery’s director, Nicholas Penny, has served notice to the trustees of the Burrell Collection of the grave risks they would be undertaking if they were to loan the collection abroad against the terms of Sir William Burrell’s magnificent 1944 bequest to the city of Glasgow.

As the [Herald Scotland](#) reports (6 September), Dr Penny has attacked the “*deplorable tendency*” for museum staffs to deny the grave risks that are run when works of art are transported around the world. In his submission to the Scottish Parliament committee now considering the bill to overturn the terms of Burrell’s bequest and his specific prohibition on overseas loans (to which committee we will be appearing as a witness this month), Penny, who has had knowledge of 10 major accidents during his career in museums and galleries in Britain and the US, offered to give details of the cases, in confidence to a trustworthy individual to be nominated by the Scottish Government. News of this offer and of Penny’s views broke when *Herald Scotland* spotted an accidental posting of his submission on the Scottish Parliament’s website.

Unsurprisingly, Penny’s bombshell has caused consternation among those wishing to send the collection on tour during a refurbishment of the building in Pollok Park which is expected to take four years and cost £40m. (We have have expressed bemusement in the past at the nicely rounded figures of building restoration costs which so often come in at sums like... £40m.)

The body “Glasgow Life” which runs Glasgow’s museums is reported to have been “*flabbergasted by this*”. If it is surprising that a museum director should be outspoken on this sensitive subject which involves a number of art world vested interests, there can be no surprise to readers of this site about the reality of the risks and the adverse material consequences of which Penny complains. In honour of Artwatch International’s founder, the late Professor James Beck, the Autumn 2007 ArtWatch UK *Journal* (No 22) carried a thirteen pages long report on the dangers of art loans – “Blockbuster Exhibitions: the Hidden Costs and Perils”, by Michael Daley and Michael Savage. For the full text of the report, click on [this PDF](#). (Michael Savage has posted a response to Penny’s intervention on his [Grumpy Art Historian](#) blog.) On 13 December 2010, in response to an appeal from Polish curators and conservators to help halt a further loan of Leonardo’s *Lady with an Ermine* (“[An Appeal from Poland](#)”), we disclosed the extent of an injury to a panel painting by Beccafumi that was dropped and smashed when being dismantled from a temporary exhibition at the National Gallery (see top, right). That photograph (and an internal report on the incident) had been

given to Artwatch by Dr Penny when we commented in our *Journal* on news of the incident carried on the National Gallery's website.

On 11 July 2011 we reported ([“Questions and Grey Answers on the Tate Gallery's recovered Turners”](#)) on how the Tate had paid a £3.5m ransom to Serbian gangsters in order to recover two Turner paintings that had been stolen when sent (without a Tate courier) to a small, badly protected German gallery.

The *Herald Scotland* reports that Glasgow Life is proud to have “formed a partnership with the British Museum, one of the leading authorities on loaning items, to benefit from its expertise”.

It is true that under its present director, Neil MacGregor, the British Museum is a hyper-active dispatcher of art around the globe (- over 4,000 objects in 2006 alone). It should be appreciated, however, that practice does not make perfect in this hazardous arena. As described in our *Journal 22* report, when the British Museum packed the peerless, desperately fragile Nimrud Palace alabaster relief carvings and sent them all to Shanghai in two cargo Jets (which broke their 16 hours flights with a stopover in Azerbaijan), it was discovered on arrival that the recipient museum's low doorways were *too low*. No one, presumably, had thought to measure them first. It was further discovered that the host museum's lifts were inadequate. In consequence, the crated carvings had to be “rolled in through the front door – which meant that we had to get a mobile crane to get them up the stairs”, the British Museum's senior heavy-objects handler, Darren Day, explained in one of the museum's self-promotional television programmes. When the collection was finally unpacked it was found that “a few little conservation things had to be done.” When crated Chinese terra cotta warriors arrived on loan at the British Museum, they, too, would not pass through the door of the reading room, even when the door's frame was removed – *some expertise?*

A restorer in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, has claimed that there is a professional concept of “acceptable potential loss” with regard to loans. As described in our [8 February 2011 post](#) (“The European Commission's way of moving works of art around”), since 2003 it has been a declared ambition of the European Commission to “facilitate”, “encourage”, “promote” and make “easy” the “mobility of art collections” within Europe. To this end, the EU urges that loaned works of art not be insured, on the extraordinary conviction that accidents can always be remedied: “in many cases, after the exhibits have been restored, only experts can assess the alteration resulting from the damage. The restored artworks can therefore be exhibited as they are.”

The simplistic Eurocratic view of restoration is the more alarming because, travel accidents aside, with increased volumes and velocities of loans come an explosion of needless, often themselves destructive, conservation and restoration “treatments” that are undertaken prior to loan exhibitions as lenders seek to protect themselves by having their works “put in condition” for travel. This is done in order to be able to identify and establish (for insurance or blame-allocation purposes) the origin of subsequent injuries. Unfortunately, putting works into restorers hands in such bids to attain supposedly optimally secure condition for travelling itself presents hazards. We discussed one of the most spectacular examples of needless injury in our [post of 8 January 2011](#). On that occasion an owner put his prized and beloved Renoir into the hands of a pair of leading restorers simply to lay a couple of small blisters and then to dispatch the picture from Washington to Paris. The restorers, without any authorisation,

presumed to clean, reline (and wreck) the painting, Renoir's Luncheon of the Boating Party, as the distraught owner, Duncan Phillips, later confessed. On arrival in Paris, the newly restored Renoir was at first rejected as a Renoir. Having long enjoyed pride of place in the home of the great collector, Phillips moved it on its return from Paris into an anteroom. Today it enjoys pride of place in a hideous over-scaled modern extension to the delightful period house that Phillips bequeathed, along with his collection. The present administrators of the museum have refused all requests to inspect the records of treatment on that painting, and, generally seem rather more animated by mounting their own [special exhibitions](#) than in ministering to the original and perfectly self-sufficient collection:

“Intersections is a series of contemporary art projects that explores —as the title suggests— the intriguing intersections between old and new traditions, modern and contemporary art practices, and museum spaces and artistic interventions. Whether engaging with the permanent collection or diverse spaces in the museum, the projects suggest new relationships with their own surprises.

“Many of the projects also riff on the nontraditional nature of the museum's galleries, sometimes activating spaces that are not typical exhibition areas with art produced specifically for those locations.”

Burrell be warned. Awful as recent “developments” at the Phillips have been, the United States has witnessed an even greater betrayal of a bequest: the wresting of the entire contents of the Barnes Collection from its, also bequested, delightful purpose-built original home and grounds, in order to place it in a worse than awful modernist pile a few miles away, hard by a noisy polluting freeway in the centre of Philadelphia. The denouement of the Barnes Bequest hike began (as is proposed at the Burrell) with a vast international travelling exhibition. At the Barnes, as now at the Burrell, the jaunt was premised on the morally-coercive “conservation” justification of putting the building itself “into condition” on behalf of the great collection of works. Humbug has rarely appeared so rank. The specially commissioned “site specific” Matisse mural was detached from the walls of the museum, packed on a flat-bed, open truck – against all reassuring conservation-compatible promises – and *carried at an angle* (see photographs, right) to Washington. Nick Tinari, who is to submit testimony to the Burrell Inquiry, has informed ArtWatch *“I can state unequivocally that damage was done on the tour to the Matisse mural, the Seurat Models and a Picasso. I have documentation for all three.”* Tinari further points out that, as with the intended Burrell tour, the Barnes tour – which netted \$7m – breached the benefactor's express prohibition on foreign loans. Far from serving to make the collection safe, that earlier exercise paved the way to a full takeover. More generally, it served as a template for trustees everywhere who might wish to harvest cash value that is otherwise locked into permanently housed works of art.

Clearly, Dr Penny's intervention addresses much more than the welfare of the Burrell Collection, precious and vulnerable though it is. It is greatly to Penny's credit that he should have spoken in such frank (and brave) terms. It is also greatly to the credit of the Scottish Parliament that it should be engaging in such an open exercise *before* another art world horse may be induced to bolt.

Michael Daley

ADDENDUM

On 7 September, *Herald Scotland* [reported](#) the submission of written evidence made by Dr Selby Whittingham of Donor Watch:

“Dr Selby Whittingham, of Donor Watch, says in his submission: *‘There can be a case for departing from the terms of a bequest when those are incapable of being carried out wholly or safely ... but that does not apply in the Burrell case in this instance.*”

‘This bill is a consequence of the current vogue for loan exhibitions and for using outward loans as barter for inward loans. This vogue is not wholly benign. It deprives visitors to a museum of works which they may expect to see. And we are not convinced that the transport of works of art is as free from hazard as the advocates of this measure optimistically maintain...’”

Comments may be left at: artwatch.uk@gmail.com

For accompanying illustrations, see below:



Above, the National Gallery's Beccafumi panel painting "Marcia", as smashed during the dismantling of a loan exhibition at the National Gallery. Photograph by courtesy of the National Gallery.



Above, top, the travel-deformed right hand panel of Matisse's mural "La Danse", as photographed by Nick Tinari when it had been removed from its original home in the Barnes Collection and was being shown on loan to the Philadelphia Museum of Art at the end of a world tour.

Above, "La Danse" when arriving on loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, as photographed by former Barnes foundation student, Danni Malitzski.

Below, "La Danse", as deformed by its global travels and as seen when on temporary exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photograph by Nick Tinari.



Below, a 14th century polychrome sculpture of Saint-Bernard which, during the Benedictus Pater Europae exhibition (Gand 1981) was knocked over, with the resulting loss of the major part of its face.



NOTICE ~ The Fifth James Beck Memorial Lecture

ArtWatch UK Notice: The 2013 James Beck Memorial Lecture

**PHILIPPE MERCIER
WATTEAU'S ENGLISH FOLLOWER**

by
Martin Eidelberg

Professor Emeritus of Art History, Rutgers University



The fifth James Beck Memorial Lecture will be given on the evening of Monday September 30th at Burlington House, London.

For full details and ticket arrangements, please contact:

The Director at ArtWatch.UK@gmail.com



Above, a China Airlines Boeing 737-800 which was destroyed by fire shortly after landing in Okinawa, Japan, on 20 August 2007. China Airlines had had four fatal aircraft accidents in the previous 13 years in which 700 people had died. On 2 September 1998, a Swissair jet carrying paintings including a £1m Picasso, crashed into the sea off Nova Scotia, killing all 229 passengers and crew. On 12 July 2001, Neil MacGregor, then director of the National Gallery, claimed that at some point in the “past five to ten years” it had become safe to shift works of art around in jets because of the invention of little widgets within packing cases that would alert handlers to any movements or shifts of condition.



Above, crowds queuing to walk past the Mona Lisa when loaned to the Washington National Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York. While being stored overnight in a safe vault at the Metropolitan Museum, the Leonardo was drenched with water by a defective sprinkler system. The Mona Lisa then travelled to Tokyo and Moscow in 1974. A request has been made for the painting to be loaned to Florence.

Below, Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*. Our support for an appeal from conservators and curators in Poland to help halt a loan of the painting was reported in the *Observer* of [12 December 2010](#). We were subsequently attacked in personal and organisational terms by Count Adam Zamoyski, the board chairman of the Czartoryski Museum, which owns the Leonardo. On 14 July 2011 it was [reported](#) from Poland that "*in order to improve the functioning of the Foundation of the Czartoryski Princes and to assure the correct collaboration with the National Museum in Krakow,*" Prince Adam Karol Czartoryski, heir to the collections of the world-renowned Czartoryski Museum, had approved the dismissal of the enterprise's entire management board, including its chairman, Count Adam Zamoyski.



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Polish Appeal to ArtWatch UK

We are watching with more and more anxiety the travels of the "Lady with an Ermine", also called the "Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani" by Leonardo da Vinci, painted in 1492, which is at the disposal of the Princes Czartoryski Foundation in Krakow, under the care of the National Museum in Krakow.

Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, in the hands of the Foundation, has been used as a means of raising revenue from fees for the loan of the picture. The attempt to justify this practice on the grounds of promoting Polish culture abroad or facilitating research by specialists is a frivolous cover. Protests by restorers have been circumvented and ignored by the Foundation, and yet the "Mona Lisa" does not leave the Louvre.

The sending of the Krakow picture abroad is insured for the sum of 300 million euros, but in the event of a disaster no one would be able to restore this priceless masterpiece to life. A few days ago the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, contrary to expert restorer/conservator opinions, issued a license to loan the picture to a forthcoming London exhibition (during the period from 1 Oct 2011 to 29 Feb 2012).

As President of the Krakow Division of the Association of Art Historians, which is charged by the Statute of the Association (under Paragraph 11, Article 6) "to shape the taste for art and knowledge about art in society and the responsibility for cultural heritage" we appeal to you to draw the attention of the world public opinion to the great dangers now faced by the work of Leonardo da Vinci, which is the common property of the whole cultural world.

Joanna Daranowska-Lukaszewska
President of the Krakow Division
of the Association of Art Historians

Above, the appeal to ArtWatch UK

Below, expert opinion from Prof. Grazyna Korpala, of ASP Krakow, and an expert of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in the field of painting restoration, on the need to protect Leonardo's Lady with an Ermine (30 November 2010).

"The work of Leonardo da Vinci called Lady with an Ermine, from the collection of the Czartoryski Museum is one of the most valuable paintings not only in the context of the Polish collections, but also of the world heritage. Such masterpieces require exceptional protection. Prevention is the main priority. Its fundamental principle is the unconditional restriction of movement and transfer to the absolutely necessary. If you transport a picture panel such as the Lady with an Ermine, even the most ideal methods in the form of modern environmental chambers or special anti-shock frames are not able to sufficiently protect the

work against a variety of vibrations, shocks or changes in pressure. By allowing the painting to travel we create yet another serious threat, largely extending the area of possible human error, while increasing the likelihood of the impact of the so-called independent factors.

“Given the technology of the picture, it is necessary to keep it under constant microclimatic conditions, in one place, in a tight microclimatic frame of the new generation, made on the basis of the already proven solutions used for panel masterpieces in renowned museums.

Only by storing the picture in a fixed location will [it be possible] to eliminate to the maximum such basic threats as unavoidable external pollution, changes in the microclimate, all kinds of shock, vibration, drastic changes in pressure, and reduce the risks resulting from independent factors.

“To sum up the basic arguments put forward for the protection of the painting Lady with an Ermine, I firmly declare that each loan and the associated means of transport are a serious, even reprehensible, threat to the state of preservation and safety of this priceless work of art. I also believe that based on the special immunities provided for outstanding works of art already developed and operating in Austria, Germany or the United States, it is necessary to grant such immunity to the painting from Krakow.

“Side note:

Like every masterpiece the painting Lady with an Ermine has a historical value, and in this value is also included – the Czartoryski Museum, Krakow’s atmosphere and the tumultuous history of the picture during the last century. Each loan ‘strips’ the work of this unique ‘setting’, which while not indifferent to the viewer, should be especially nurtured and protected in the Polish reality.”

For the full text of the ArtWatch UK Journal 22, Autumn 2007 Report:

Blockbuster Exhibitions: the Hidden Costs and Perils

A Report, in Honour of James Beck

By Michael Daley and Michael Savage

Go to:

<http://artwatchuk.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/6-september-2013/>

And click on pdf at:

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