

An ArtWatch UK Submission to the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill Committee, on:

Concrete evidence of injuries to works of art during overseas travel

Public knowledge of *any* travel-induced injuries is incomplete because accounts of such are rarely volunteered whether works of art are travelling at home or abroad - or even when being moved within an institution. International travel compounds risks because:

1) The distances are greater and exposure to fluctuations of environment and vibrations at high and fluctuating altitudes is correspondingly greater and longer. In "Conservation and Exhibitions" (Butterworths, 1987) the conservator Nathan Stolow said that: *"There are few reports available on the damage of works of art resulting from atmospheric pressure changes in air travel. Figure 10.20 illustrates the extensive damage caused to a painting in an air trip from London to Rome. The large paint losses here were attributed to sharp changes in the internal relative humidity during the itinerary, most likely caused by pressure changes."*

Such risks were confirmed to ArtWatch by one of its members who had been a trans-Atlantic pilot on Boeing 707s. As Stolow reported, when Henry Holiday's, "Dante and Beatrice" was en route from London to Rome on loan from the Walker gallery in Liverpool it suffered severe damage resulting in the subsequent repairs shown below. Stolow cited another incident where water got into a packing case on the Tarmac. When Leonardo's "Mona Lisa" was loaned to the Metropolitan Museum in New York it was drenched overnight by a faulty sprinkle in a security vault.



2) The logistics and costs of preparing works for long international journeys make it financially necessary to show travelling exhibitions in more than one venue. (We note that

the latest attempt to overturn Burrell's prohibition on foreign travels is linked to a desire to generate revenue to fund repairs and an expansion of the museum.)

3) Multiple exhibitions *increase* the number of points at which accidents occur through human error (*i.e.* when loading and unloading from aeroplanes at each stage, when loading and unloading on to vans or lorries for intermediary journeys, when hanging and dismantling exhibitions, and so forth). Evidence exists in the National Gallery's internal report on the smashed Beccafumi panel painting (which we cited on 19 September) that the circumstances when exhibitions are being dismantled can be dangerously chaotic - Nicholas Penny would surely make this report available to your Committee - a National Gallery Trustee told us that "it was pandemonium" when the Beccafumi exhibition was being dismantled.

4) When museums attempt to spread the risk of loss by flying exhibitions in a number of aeroplanes they reduce the risk of a total loss but multiply the risk of *some* loss.

5) Evidence is frequently encountered in picture conservation dossiers that chronic problems have begun with travel injuries. In the case of Renoir's "Umbrellas" (which moves regularly between the London and Dublin National Galleries) the first cracking in the paint occurred along the lines of the canvas's horizontal reinforcing stretcher bar. In the case of Laura Knight's Self-Portrait with Nude" at the National Portrait Gallery, the increased cracking that has attended increased lending has drawn a recommendation that the stretcher bars (against which canvasses vibrate during travel) be padded to reduce the injuries. We note that string musicians buy second seat tickets so that they can keep their cellos or violins with them at all times on international flights.

Some Known and Reported Cases of Injury:

1) On 24 October 2007 the *Daily Telegraph* published a letter from Artwatch UK on the risks to and injuries of Turner's paintings. It read:

"Sir – the Mellon Center's decision (report, October 17) to break its own rule never to lend Turner's fragile Dort or Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed seems perverse: only seven years ago, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston lent its Turner Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying, Typhoon coming on to the Tate. On its return to Boston, that painting was found to have suffered losses of paint and to be in an 'extremely unstable condition'.

"A Tate spokesman said: 'It arrived here safely...Its condition was stable. However Turner's paintings are notorious for becoming unstable.' This being so, why are trustees and curators prepared to take such risks with priceless works of art?"

The injury only emerged when Selby Whittingham of Donor Watch asked the Boston museum why it had not loaned this Turner to a more recent exhibition of the artist's seascapes. Neither the Boston museum nor the Tate had announced the fact of the injury.

2) On 13 July 2007 the *Daily Telegraph* published this letter from ArtWatch UK:

“Sir – The claim by the National Gallery’s director, Neil MacGregor, that it became safe at some point in ‘the past five to ten years’ to jet art treasures around the world is far from reassuring (report, July 12).

“A gadget in the latest picture containers might well, as Mr MacGregor promises, alert handlers to ‘any movement in the container’, but what then? Will they be able to enter a container and rectify a problem?

“Do containers now hold gadgets that will warn against, or prevent, crashes such as the one in 1998, when a Swissair jet was lost off the coast of Nova Scotia while carrying 229 passengers, 2.2lb of diamonds and a £1million Picasso?

Putting all of the ten other fragments of Masaccio’s Pisa altarpiece on planes from Italy, Germany and the United States to London for a showing with the National Gallery’s own panel might seem an exciting prospect but it can hardly be considered a risk-free exercise.”

3, 4, 5 and 6) As reported in the ArtWatch UK *Journal No 22*:

*“In 2000 **pages of the Book of Kells were damaged** by vibration when the precious illuminated manuscript was flown from Ireland to Australia. In 2004 a **Raphael was found** on arrival at the National Gallery’s ‘Raphael: From Urbino to Rome’ show **to have suffered ‘a raised crack’** in transit...In 2006 when 251 **Asyrian objects** were flown from the British Museum to Shanghai, it was found on arrival that **‘a few little conservation things had to be done’**...In 1998 **Canova’s marble The Three Graces**, [which is jointly owned by and shuttled between the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Galleries in Edinburgh] was moved in a purpose built, climate-controlled crate, first by lorry from Edinburgh to Portsmouth, then by ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao, and finally from Bilbao to Madrid by Lorry. On arrival it was **found to have suffered a crack.***

7 and 8) – As reported on 13 December 2010 on the Artwatch UK website:

*“In 1993 a **Boucher painting was lost** in an exhibition from New York to Detroit to Paris...In 1993 the New York Times art critic, Michael Kimmelman, highlighted the professional self-censorship that modern museum practices enforce: ‘no museum, either as lender or borrower wants the taint of irresponsibility or carelessness. Although conservators, curators and directors privately raise doubts all the time about fragile and important works of art being moved around by other institutions, they virtually never speak out. When they do, it is as one chorus: nothing goes wrong where they are.’... In 2001, Nicholas Penny disclosed that ‘museum employees are obliged to stifle their anxieties’...**In 2001 a Rembrandt** insured for \$12m, and sent from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow in a ‘climate-controlled container’, **suffered a gash nearly three by 1.4 inches.** A protracted dispute over liability and insurance compensation ensued. The Pushkin Museum claimed that the case must have been dropped en route: ‘If it was badly packed it would be a different type of damage. To rip through several inches of it, there had to be a blow that allowed the picture to fall from the frame.’*

In 19 December 2002 *The New York Times* reported (“ARTS ABROAD”):

“In February 2001, Tatyana M. Popova received the late-night phone call every museum curator dreads. Somewhere on the way from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Rembrandt's "Portrait of an Elderly Woman" received a gash nearly 3 by 1.4 inches wide in the bottom right corner. The two museums had just signed a long-term exchange agreement that continues and is prized by both museums. But the Pushkin Museum's long wrangle with a leading Russian insurer and a Lloyd's underwriter over how much depreciation should be paid for the damage was resolved only today...

9 & 10) Thefts - As reported on 13 December 2010 on the Artwatch UK website:

***Two Turners were stolen** from when loaned to the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt in 1994. They were only returned in 2002 after the Tate had paid a ransom of more than £3m. In November 2006 the Toledo museum's **Goya 'Children with a Cart' was stolen** en route for an exhibition at the Guggenheim museum in New York.*

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