

LETTERS

70 South Lambeth Road London SW8 1RL UK j.morris@theartnewspaper.com

The new Barnes is forgetting its founding principles

Last May, the Barnes Foundation moved its legendary collection of Impressionist, Post-impressionist, early Modern, and African art from Merion, Pennsylvania to an immense, sleek structure on a busy boulevard four miles away in Philadelphia. The removal of the Barnes Foundation collection from its purpose-built gallery remains one of the most outrageous undertakings ever to affect an American cultural institution. The Barnes Foundation has been transformed from a low-budget, contemplative place for art appreciation to a high stakes “must see” art tourism destination. A monument of international cultural significance has been destroyed and made into a replica for use as an economic stimulus for an ailing city. Many people are also disgusted at the perversion of donor intent laws and the overwhelming

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influence of Big Philanthropy on the legal process that sealed the Barnes's fate. But now what? Now, so soon after its makeover, the Barnes Foundation is apparently experiencing growing pains. The Foundation recently announced a new ticket price structure, ostensibly designed to motivate people to visit at less popular hours, with increases from 22%-33%. Visitors who come before 2.30pm will pay \$22. If they come from 3pm until closing, they will pay the old price – \$18. Senior citizens will pay \$20 in prime time, up from \$15. Student prices remain unchanged at \$10. Admission tickets now include a bizarre bonus – an audio tour that includes the Foundation's British director explaining how to behave: “We're seeing many more people not familiar... with what is proper behaviour,” says Derek Gillman, the Barnes's president and chief executive in the

Philadelphia Inquirer (18 April 2013). Between the director's admonitions and the 22%-33% increase, people of modest income may be discouraged from visiting at all. That is a terrible outcome, since accessibility for the “plain people” was the pretext for the move to the city. The Barnes administration denies that raising revenue was the objective, but this claim inspires more scepticism. Are lacklustre fund-raising results, weak party bookings and stupendous executive staff salaries being foisted on the public with higher entrance fees, even as the local paper crows about stellar attendance figures? Most American museums do not count heavily on gate receipts; they get the bulk of their money from donations, income from their endowment and board members. The Barnes Foundation Board has a unique mandate to serve working class people, spelled out in its governing document: “It will be incumbent upon the Board... to make

such... regulations as will ensure that the plain people, that is, men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories... and similar places, shall have free access to the art gallery...” Long-time Barnes Board chairman Bernard Watson often quoted from that passage in the Foundation's Indenture of Trust as justification for the move to the City. Evidently, Mr Watson has changed his mind. Or perhaps he and the Board have new priorities, such as keeping the place afloat.

Evelyn Yaari
President, Barnes Watch

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and restitution: a clarification

Concerning the claims of the lawyer representing the Goudstikker heirs (“Canada under pressure over potential Nazi loot” *The Art Newspaper*, April, p3), the Montreal Museum of



The wealth of the people: the Barnes Foundation's move remains controversial

Fine Arts (MMFA) underlines that it follows the discussions between the government of the Netherlands and the representatives of the Goudstikker family regarding the *Deification of Aeneas* by Charles Le Brun, a well known and studied file. The painting was one of a group of looted works that were returned by the Allies after the War and that were officially sold at auction by the Dutch authorities in 1951: it was purchased by Schaeffer Galleries of New York and acquired by the MMFA in 1953. The compensation paid at that time to the dealer's widow leads now to a disagreement between the heirs and the government of The Netherlands. After an in-depth investigation of both points of view, the MMFA, like the two American museums involved with works from the same group, has

closed this file until additional facts come to light. The recent restitution of Honthorst's *The Duet* required the due diligence of independent research in German and other archives, which the Museum undertook. As soon as the tragic history of the picture and legal connection of the heirs were confirmed, the MMFA gave up all claim and title to the work. This great painting is being sold by the Spiro descendants in New York this June. Partly, thanks to the compensation we received because this painting was bought in good faith, we have recently acquired [at the most recent European Fine Arts Fair in Maastricht] another work. In fact, by great coincidence, we found another superb Honthorst, *Woman Tuning a Lute* dated the same year (1624). We have decided, on our own

initiative, to attach the following to the credit line to our newly acquired painting: “In memory of Bruno Richard Spiro and Ellen Clara Spiro.” Indeed, a very moving public ceremony with the new chairman of the board of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Mario Silva and Jean-François Lisée, Quebec's minister for international relations, la Francophonie and external trade and minister responsible for the Montreal region, was held at the Museum on 23 April. The Spiro grandson openly thanked the MMFA for its good collaboration. At the same time, during this unusual ceremony, we also received a fine painting previously looted. *Children on Their Way Home from School* [1836], by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller was given to our Museum by the Jorisch family in order to thank Montreal hospitality for 15,000 Jewish immigrants after the war. In a published letter dated 19 April 2013 by Canada's minister of citizenship, immigration and multiculturalism, Jason Kenney stated: “Our government is committed to the restitution of cultural property, and is glad to see that the MMFA shares this sentiment. In fact, your groundbreaking initiative in 1999 to see Giorgio Vasari's *Wedding Feast at Cana* returned to the Fine Arts Museum of Budapest demonstrates your adherence to seeking justice. With this recognition of the Spiro family, the MMFA is once again showing its leadership in the international art community.”

Nathalie Bondil
Director and chief curator, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Corrections

- In our April edition (*The Art Newspaper* 2, p5) we incorrectly reported the amount that the Parisian dealer Enrico Navarra had demanded in damages and interest from the Swiss dealer Pierre Huber. It should have said €12.5m, not €13.6m.
- In last month's heritage feature in our China Focus (*The Art Newspaper* 2, p21), we mistakenly named the Global Heritage Fund as the Global Heritage Foundation.