

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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Statement from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, October 20, 1978:

The Trustees of the National Gallery of Art at their regularly scheduled Board meeting on October 20 considered the recommendation of the Acquisitions Committee of the Board concerning conservation at the National Gallery.

The Acquisitions Committee's recommendations were based on the findings of a panel of consultants who were invited by the Board to survey the conservation of paintings at the National Gallery.

The survey revealed confidence in the integrity and professionalism of the Gallery's conservation staff. No member of the panel, chosen to reflect a broad spectrum of viewpoints on conservation, found any evidence of physical harm to the Gallery's paintings. The members of the panel also endorsed the principle of the Gallery's cleaning its paintings.

The composition of the panel was as follows:

Everett Fahy, Director of the Frick Collection, New York
Robert L. Feller, Director, Center on Materials of the Artist and
Conservation, Carnegie-Mellon Institute of Research, Pittsburgh
Sydney J. Freedberg, Professor of Fine Arts, Harvard University;
Acting Director, The Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge
George Heard Hamilton, Professor Emeritus of Art, Williams College;
Director Emeritus, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute,
Williamstown
Sheldon Keck, Director, Cooperstown Graduate Program in Conservation,
Cooperstown, New York; President, International Institute of
Conservation
Sherman E. Lee, Director, Cleveland Museum of Art
Hubert von Sonnenburg, Director, Doerner-Institute, Munich; former
Chief Conservator, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
John Walsh, Jr., Baker Curator of Paintings, Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston
Otto Wittmann, Consultant to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
The J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Toledo Museum, and former Director
of the Toledo Museum of Art

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Following this review, and on recommendation by the Acquisitions Committee, the Board expressed its confidence in the competence of the present conservation staff and in their curatorial advisors. The moratorium on cleaning, instituted while the President and Trustees were reviewing conservation at the National Gallery, was ended and the staff was authorized to proceed with work in progress. This includes Rembrandt's The Mill.

At the same time, the Board approved a resolution of the Acquisitions Committee of the Board amending the administrative procedures whereby conservation decisions are made to provide for greater involvement of the Acquisitions Committee and the Director. In approving this resolution the Board noted that under the Joint Resolution of Congress of March 27, 1937 establishing the National Gallery, the Board has the fiduciary obligation of a trustee in respect of all works of art acquired by the Gallery and that the Trustees' By-laws charge the Acquisitions Committee with the duty of acting in an advisory capacity to the President and Director (ex officio members of the Committee) in all matters pertaining to the safe-guarding, maintenance and exhibition of works of art at the National Gallery.

The Board approved the recommendation of the Acquisitions Committee that in cases involving major treatment of major works of art, special consultants and specialists may be called in on an ad hoc basis,

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recognizing that conservation problems must be addressed on a case-by-case basis, and that no conservation staff can be expected to contain specialists in every situation that might arise.

The Board endorsed the decision of the Gallery's President, Paul Mellon, to initiate this review of conservation at the National Gallery and recorded the Board's sense of the importance in all conservation at the Gallery of consideration of the final appearance of the work of art, as well as the development and application of all relevant scientific information in the treatment employed.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.