1971

Conservation: Hearings, Reports (1966-1973): Correspondence 04

J. Carter Brown

GW Senator Pell
Stan Weber

JUN 15 1971

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20565

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June 11, 1971

Dear Claiborne:

It was good to have you present on May 6 to share with us the excitement of the groundbreaking and to study our plans for the new East Building, and I want you to know I appreciated it.

I am also replying to your letter of April 29 and its appendant list of six questions in some detail and trust you will find these replies helpful.

As you doubtless saw from the plans, our conservation space will be wonderfully provided for in the remodeling of the present building, the areas now occupied by food services and various administrative offices. These are the spaces which will be turned over to the Chief Chemist, the Chief Conservator and the Chief Photographer for their important work.

I append some pages with specific answers to your six questions and under separate cover I am sending several conservation publications of the National Gallery which you will find of interest. We have had a very active staff in the artists' materials research and development areas, and when we are able to put along side it an adequate staff of practicing conservators in paper, sculpture, and painting, we will indeed be able to maintain and preserve the National

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Gallery collections as well as to provide the leadership in research in materials and methods of conservation of paintings which the Nation needs.

Very best, as always,

Sincerely,

J. Carter Brown
Director

The Honorable
Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Attachments

Information on Conservation Plans
National Gallery of Art
prepared for Senator Pell in reply to questions
posed in his letter of 29 April, 1971

(a) Size of Laboratory.

At this juncture in planning, the following allocations have been made in square feet:

Conservation Laboratory:

Painting	2,700	
Sculpture	1,400	
Paper	800	
Offices	350	5,150

Analytical Laboratory:

Lab 1	1,470	
Lab 2	1,400	
Offices and Library	660	
Chemical stores	320	3,850
Total - Square Feet		9,000

(b) Total Budget:

Budget requirements broadly broken down are as follows:

Analytical Laboratory:

Deterioration of artists' materials	240,000
Nuclear methods for characterization of artists' materials	230,000
	470,000
Conservation Laboratory	204,000
Total -	674,000

These figures do not include the equipment or equipment maintenance, which would total somewhere in the neighborhood of $500,000 for both laboratories, and possibly be spread over more than one year. The laboratory (now located in Pittsburgh) already owns considerable equipment, including computer, microscopes, color measurement instruments, carbon 14 counter, gaschromotographic equipment, thousands of pigment samples, a technical laboratory, furniture, ovens, and laboratory miscellanea.

(c) Staff:

A proposed staff list follows with proposed GS salary grades indicated:

Division of Conservation

Chief Conservation Officer	16
Senior Conservator - Painting	14
Conservator - paper	12
Conservator - Sculpture	12
Conservator - Painting	12
Assistant Conservator	10
Assistant Conservator	10
Assistant for Inspection and Documentation	10
Assistant for Special Projects	10
Technical Assistant	8
Technical Assistant	8
Technical Assistant	8
Clerk - Stenographer	6
Clerk - Typist	4

Analytical Laboratory

Senior Chemist	14
Microscopist - Microchemist	12
Gas Chromatographic Chemist	10
Assistant for Scientific Documentation	10
X-ray Technician	8
Infra Red and Chromatographic Technician	10
Professional Apprentices	
Clerk Typist	4

(d) Chief Area of Interest:

(1) Analytical -

Study of easel paintings, particularly those in the Collections. The 20-year-old-National Gallery of Art Research Project, presently located in Pittsburgh at the Mellon Institute, sponsored with private funds, was established to investigate the materials of the artist and conservator with a special view towards their permanence (or durability). This has led to the development of new coatings, pigments, dyes, and adhesives and a better understanding of the way that materials deteriorate. In addition, there have been new developments in the protection of museum objects from light and heat.

About five years ago, new avenues of research were opened through studies of nuclear-science methods for the characterization of artists' pigments. In connection with research on the fading of pigments and dyes and measurement of color, the newer studies on "fingerprinting" of pigments by nuclear methods (neutron activation analysis, radioactive "dating", and isotope-ratio measurements) further emphasizes our current primary interest; which is the characterization of artists' pigments. It is intended, however, to continue the pioneering and unique basic research on the deterioration of the materials used in the creation and conservation of easel painting.

(2) Conservation, restoration and records -

Conservation and restoration of objects in the National Gallery of Art collections to provide pleasure to the viewer and a surveillance and maintenance program to prevent further deterioration, accompanied by a program of inspection and records made in a regular and systematic basis in support of conservation of objects and of advanced study and research in all aspects of art historical and art technical research.

This is an urgent need at this time in which we hope to make an early beginning.

(e) Cooperation with other Government agencies:

The Atomic Energy Commission and the National Science Foundation have for several years sponsored investigations of interest to the National Gallery of Art. The Internal Revenue Service has expressed particular interest in the studies which will assist in the identification of "modern" pigments and paint vehicles. Dr. Robert L. Feller, our Chief Conservation Officer, has served for twenty years on the National Bureau of Standards' standing committee on "Artists Oil Paints". He has also collaborated in joint editorial duties, professional committees, and publications with R. J. Gettens of the Freer Gallery of Art. Cooperative studies on pigments in certain American paintings are in progress with Mr. Charles Olin of the National Collection of Fine Arts/National Portrait Gallery and scientists at the National Bureau of Standards have been measuring the isotope-ratio characteristic of lead white pigment in a joint research investigation involving Dr. Robert Brill of the Corning Museum of Glass and Dr. Feller.

Dr. Feller serves with Mr. Peter Powers and Mr. Robert Organ of the Museum of History and Technology (Smithsonian) on the standing committee of the Rome Centre established by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. As past president of the IIC-American Group, editor of its Bulletin, and a member of its executive committee, he is brought into contact with colleagues at the Library of Congress, Freer Gallery of Art, Museum of History and Technology, and National Collection of Fine Arts/National Portrait Gallery, knowing each personally and consulting them on their areas of research and specialities. On occasion the laboratory of the Museum of History and Technology has treated metal objects from our collections, but rarely because of the great demands put on them by other Smithsonian departments.

(f) Cooperation with Industry:

Location of the Research Project in conservation at the Mellon Institute, Pittsburgh*, was initially proposed because of the recognized benefits to be gained by association with the industrially-sponsored research investigations being conducted there all "under one roof". The Union Carbide group helped us with advice on synthetic resins; Gulf Oil with solvent purification and microbiological testing of mold growth in stone buildings; St. Joseph Minerals on special zinc oxide pigments. Dr. Feller has published articles jointly with a color scientist at the PPG Industries paint research laboratories in nearby Springdale, Pennsylvania.

The initial objective of the Research Project was to develop new materials for the artist and conservator. To meet this obligation the research findings have been freely published and personal correspondence has been maintained with leading manufacturers of artists' materials in America and abroad. Dr. Feller serves as technical director of the American Artists' Professional League and as such has helped industry to provide more stable pigments and varnishes for artists. Advice is also given to suppliers of conservator's materials to assist professional restorers to maintain high standards of quality and purity. Advice on lighting, air conditioning and safety is being given to the designers of the National Art Fleet, at the request of Miss Nancy Hanks, and to the Director of the National Gallery of Art. Assistance has also been given to architects, designers of skylighting systems and illuminating companies.

Dr. Feller is a member of the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) and the Committee Internationale d'Eclairages (CIE) committees on museums. He is also a director of the Inter-Society Color Council and an associate editor of the new Journal of Color and Appearance, activities which foster interaction with industrial personnel.

*Carnegie-Mellon University

Our own field includes museum professionals, artists, and professional conservators. Dr. Feller has long served on the council of the International Institute for the Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works (IIC), and its American Group (IIC-AG), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Committee on Conservation. He has published two technical reviews for UNESCO. He also has served on the advisory boards of the Conservation Center, N.Y.C.; Winterthur Museum, and the Museum of Primitive Art, N.Y.C. Publications, lectures and personal visits and correspondence attest to many years of service to conservators in America and artists as well. The Research Project has served the IIC Abstracts for nearly twenty years in various editorial capacities and Dr. Feller has served eleven years as editor of the Bulletin of the American Group-IIC, a vital channel of communication for American, Canadian, and Mexican authorities in the field of conservation and technical examinations.