

FRIENDS of the BARNES FOUNDATION

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What Is Good for Dr. Gross is Good for Dr. Barnes

Friends of the Barnes Foundation Challenge Double Standard

(MERION STATION, PA) Friends of the Barnes Foundation, the organization dedicated to preserving the Barnes Foundation in Merion, draws unsettling comparisons between the proposed move of Albert Barnes' famed art collection and the fate of *The Gross Clinic* by Thomas Eakins and urges public debate of the issue.

Philadelphia has become energized to fend off the move of the famous Eakins painting from the city through a pending sale to Walmart heiress and art patron Alice Walton and The National Gallery of Art for \$68 million.

At the same time, a relocation of art on a far greater scale is planned for the art of the Barnes Foundation from its world-famous Merion site to a location five miles away in Philadelphia in an act that overturns the explicit wishes of Albert Barnes. Rebecca Rimel, of the Pew Charitable Trusts, The Annenberg Foundation, and H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest, of The Lenfest Foundation are leading the transfer of the Barnes art collection from Merion to Philadelphia.

Friends of the Barnes Foundation noted disturbing inconsistencies in the response of Philadelphia's civic and cultural leadership to the two art-related stories: Both cases include the interplay of art, education, and medicine; and the meaning of cultural heritage. In *The Gross Clinic*,

many Philadelphians see a deep connection between this particular painting to this city in a bond of cultural patrimony that should continue in perpetuity by the painting remaining in Philadelphia.

The connection of the Barnes Foundation to Merion is more profound, because Albert Barnes specifically selected it for his foundation as a fully contextual, site-specific arrangement. The undeniable cultural patrimony of the legacy was made clear in Barnes' bequest that the entire foundation -- collection, gallery and grounds-- should remain in Merion in perpetuity. Removing the art would eviscerate the Barnes Foundation, whereas *The Gross Clinic* would itself be unaltered by a transfer of ownership.

Rather than desecrate the bequest of Albert Barnes, who deliberately fiercely independent of the art and culture elite of Philadelphia, Friends of the Barnes are in favor of a renewal of support for an intact Barnes Foundation in Merion to include visitation via a shuttle bus system, coordinated through the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Friends of the Barnes Foundation is calling for public debate about the Barnes issue and an open examination of the plan to move it. Spokesperson Sandra Gross Bressler said, "On the one hand, city leaders decry the move of *The Gross Clinic* from Philadelphia for high-minded reasons. On the other hand, they suspend those very same reasons as they applaud the move of the Barnes Foundation art collection from Merion to Philadelphia. What is right for Dr. Gross is right for Dr. Barnes. Removing the art collection from the Barnes Foundation would be like removing Dr. Gross's image from the Eakins canvas and leaving the rest of the painting in Philadelphia."

Friends of the Barnes Foundation urges public discussion of the public interest issues involved:

- The Barnes Foundation is a national cultural treasure, which would be destroyed by the move.
- The Barnes Foundation is much more than an art collection. It is a site-specific work of art, an integrated whole, composed of art and ethnographic collections, buildings, and grounds.

- Unbeknownst to the Orphan's Court, two years before its decision permitting, (but not mandating) the move, the Pennsylvania legislature appropriated \$100,000,000 for "Design and construction of a museum facility to house the Barnes art collection." (Senate Bill 1213) When these state funds are used, they will have to be matched dollar-for-dollar by the city of Philadelphia.
- The cost of the planned move is enormous, currently estimated at upwards of \$250 million. Endowment support of the Barnes in Merion would be less than one-tenth the cost of the move.
- Regional arts and cultural groups would be adversely affected should the plan to move the artwork go forward.
- For donors and recipients of philanthropy, serious, long-range implications would result from the move of the Barnes art collection.

For further information, contact Friends of the Barnes Foundation at barnesfriends@comcast.net, or visit the organization's website at www.barnesfriends.org.

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