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Opponents urge U.S. judge to reconsider Barnes Foundation's move

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By JoAnn Loviglio, Associated Press

Merion, Pennsylvania

Opponents of a plan to move The Barnes Foundation's multibillion-dollar art collection to Philadelphia filed a petition Monday asking a judge to reconsider his decision allowing the move.

The suburban gallery, which holds a world-class trove of French masterpieces and thousands of other paintings and objects, won court permission in 2004 to deviate from Dr. Albert Barnes' will, which instructs that his paintings "remain in exactly the places they are" after his death. Barnes died in a 1951 car crash.

The foundation's trustees, arguing to break the will, said that moving its 181 Renoirs, 69 Cezannes, 60 Matisse, 44 Picassos and other works to a spot near the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Rodin Museum was necessary to rescue it from the brink of bankruptcy.

Monday's petition seeks to persuade Montgomery County Orphans' Court Judge Stanley Ott, who has jurisdiction over Barnes' trust, to rescind his previous order, remove the current board of directors and place the foundation in receivership.

"It's a drastic remedy, but drastic measures require drastic remedies," Mark Schwartz, lawyer for a citizens' group seeking to block the move, said at a news conference.

Barnes, a pharmaceutical magnate, established the foundation in 1922 to teach populist methods of appreciating and evaluating art. His collection has been housed in the 23-room limestone gallery in Lower Merion since 1925. The works are displayed close together and grouped in eclectic ways to encourage a fresh viewing, as Barnes had wanted.

The Barnes has raised \$150 million (€109.8 million) to build a new home and establish an operating endowment.

A Barnes spokesman did not immediately return a call seeking comment.