

FRIENDS of the BARNES FOUNDATION

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DESTRUCTION OF BARNES IN MERION BY REMOVAL OF ITS ART COLLECTION IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE OPTION

(MERION STATION, PA; Feb. 26, 2010) The advocacy organization Friends of the Barnes Foundation pursues permanent preservation for the Barnes Foundation in Merion with a new and powerful tool for the cause. The documentary about the Barnes controversy, “The Art of the Steal,” will be released today in Philadelphia and New York followed by nationwide distribution to more than 75 cities as far away as Honolulu, Hawaii. The film chronicles the beginnings of the controversy over the plan to dismantle the Barnes Foundation, moving its art collection from its historic, purpose-built setting in Merion to replication in a costly facility on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway Philadelphia.

The Friends have incorporated a petition and a letter to donors to the move on their website that people from around the country will be able to use to join the groundswell of opposition to the dismantling of the Barnes in Merion. The petition is available at <http://www.barnesfriends.org>

Friends of the Barnes Foundation Steering Committee member Robert Zaller (who appears in “The Art of the Steal”) said, “The release of this film represents an important turning point in this controversy. For the very first time, the truth about the stacked deck that was the basis for moving the Barnes will be exposed. At the same time, the important legacy that Albert C. Barnes intended to bequeath to the world for generations will be understood by tens of thousands of Americans. This is part of our shared cultural heritage that must not be plowed under by powerful political and commercial interests.”

The Friends have been working to stop the move since the 2004 decision by Judge Stanley Ott of Montgomery County Orphans' Court granting permission – not a mandate – for the move. The Friends have continued to inform the public and public officials about a number of factors relevant to the plan to dismantle the Barnes, including:

- Projected construction costs have increased by 50% to \$150 million.
- Building size decreased by 30% from 120,000 – 150,000 s.f. down to 93,000 s.f.
- Endowment plan had been increased to \$100 million, now down to \$50 million.
- \$107 million in Pennsylvania Taxpayer funds could be going into what was originally supposed to be a project funded by private philanthropy. Meanwhile, state funding for art and culture for everyone else has been slashed to the bone.
- Stagnation in project's fund-raising. \$150 million goal was announced in May 2006. Since then, project has gone up to \$200 million, but funding is practically unchanged.
- The documentary *The Art of the Steal* is expected to negatively impact future fund-raising.
- No detailed feasibility or sustainability studies have been published on the proposed Barnes project in Philadelphia.
- National Historic Landmark status, for which the Barnes in Merion is eligible, would be forfeited by a move to Philadelphia.
- Recently, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission confirmed the negative impact of the removal of the Barnes art collection on the integrity of the Merion site and its eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.

Friends of the Barnes Foundation advocates permanent preservation of the Barnes Foundation in Merion which includes its site specific art collection, purpose-built gallery building, historic arboretum and its integrated schools of art appreciation and horticulture established by Dr. Albert C. Barnes. To learn more, go to www.barnesfriends.org.

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