

1972

## Conservation: Hearings, Reports, Correspondence (1971-1973): Speech 02

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

Statement  
On  
Museum Conservation/Renovation

In the last decade, conservation has become a major concern throughout the nation. It has brought Americans in all walks of life together in a vast effort to preserve our national resources.

Our parks and wilderness regions are national treasures. So, too, are the priceless collections housed in the nation's museums. They, too, are irreplaceable. They, too, must be protected.

The National Council on the Arts believes it essential that the urgent problems of preservation and conservation faced by museums be brought to the public attention. The Council is convinced that only a major concentrated effort by museums, universities, private citizens, foundations, corporations, local and state governments can restore and safeguard our heritage for future generations.

The problems are critical:

-- Air pollution fouls and destroys pigments, metals, and finishes, and corrodes marble architecture and sculpture;

-- Improper temperature control causes warpage and discoloration;

-- Too much or too little humidity can rot, corrode or warp wood, fabrics, leather, jewelry;

-- Mold and mildew attack delicate fabrics and documents;

-- Uncontrolled lighting causes paintings, costumes, and other fragile items to fade;

-- Insects burrow into antique furniture, stretchers and frames of paintings, and devour American Indian feathered or textile objects;

-- Security systems are outmoded or insufficient to meet the threats of theft, vandalism, and fire.

Last year the National Endowment for the Arts surveyed 450 selected museums to get some idea of the scope of the conservation/renovation needs. The results were unequivocal. Museum directors across the country placed a high priority on preservation. However, as public demand for services and the resulting financial pressures have grown, museums have had to turn their attention to the more visible public service programs: exhibitions, education projects, community programming, children's projects. The crucial problems of preservation have not received the needed attention or funds.

The National Council on the Arts views conservation and renovation of facilities for preservation purposes as primarily local responsibilities. The role of the National Endowment for the Arts at the federal level will be to help focus national attention on the severe problems and to encourage private, corporate and local/state support.

In Conservation, the number of laboratories and qualified conservators is totally inadequate to handle the works that desperately need attention.

Therefore, Endowment grants in a two-year pilot program in Conservation will assist:

- Expansion and improvement of training programs for conservators;

- Strengthening established conservation centers to enable them to serve an entire region;

- Creation of new regional conservation centers;

- Development by museums of long-range plans to meet their conservation needs;

- Limited emergency treatment for selected works.

In Renovation, the immediate need is to enable museums to survey their requirements for adequate environmental and security control, and then to begin a private/public effort to accomplish the necessary renovation.

Endowment grants in Renovation will enable museums to hire specialists to assess their problems and recommend solutions.

In addition, even with the limited monies available, the Endowment will help fund the installation of environmental and security control systems. These renovation project grants must be matched by at least \$3 in other funds for every federal dollar.

In launching the Endowment's pilot programs in Conservation/Renovation in Fiscal Years 1972 and 1973, the National Council hopes to call public attention to the seriousness of the situation. The Council believes that preservation of the nation's cultural heritage should be a major goal for the Bicentennial celebration.

The Council wishes to express its gratitude to the Museum Advisory Panel for its assistance in formulating the Endowment's program. The panel is chaired by Evan Turner, Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Louis Jones, Director of the New York State Historical Association. The program has been developed under the leadership of Thomas Leavitt, Director of the Endowment's Museum Program

since January, 1971. On Mr. Leavitt's return to his position as Director of the Andrew Dickson White Museum at Cornell University on July 1, 1972, Dr. John Spencer, Director of the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College in Ohio, will take over direction of the program.

May 8, 1972  
Wilmington, Delaware