

THE J PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
memorandum

to J Paul Getty
from Stephen Garrett
date 17 January 1975
re Air conditioning

General

You will recall that you expressed concern on various occasions in the past at the costs involved in operating the air conditioning system.

This led to me preparing a report for you (dated November 1) which we discussed at Sutton Place. In this report I gave my opinion that we should continue to run the system in the same way as we had done previously while taking every opportunity to trim its consumption.

When submitting the report to you, I also showed you supplementary reports which had been prepared by the curators and conservators commenting on the importance of maintaining the system in the same way as previously.

However, you disagreed with our conclusions. You asked that the consumption be reduced from my estimated figure of \$32,400 per annum to \$16,200 per annum. You confirmed your instructions on the manner in which you wished the system to operate in a memorandum which I received here on 11 November.

Compliance with instructions

I discussed your instructions with the curators, conservators, and the engineers. While the engineers were ready to operate the system in any way that they were told, the curators and conservators were all of the opinion that the views they had expressed previously were still valid and that compliance with your instructions would expose the art objects to various risks.

However, it was not easy to be sure how serious the risks might prove to be. While one can be fearful of

memorandum to : Mr J Paul Getty
17 January 1975
page 2

damage to art objects generally when subjected to certain conditions (especially fluctuating conditions), one cannot be sure just how individual objects will react. We felt that we had done everything that we could to alert you to the implications of reducing the air conditioning system and that we had no option but to try to comply with your instructions.

But the results of doing this were quickly apparent. Attached to this report are separate reports (and photographs) which have been prepared by the curators and conservators which record the serious effects of this action.

Subsequent action

I felt that I had no alternative but to instruct the engineers to revert to operating the air conditioning system through 24 hours and that they were to continue to explore every way in which it could be run, trimmed to the bone, as economically as possible. This is what is being done at the present time.

It remains my opinion that if we are to avoid further damage to the art objects, we must continue in this manner.

Comments

There are two factors which I would like to ask you to consider in deciding what action you wish me to take.

Firstly, the fluctuation in temperature and humidity at Malibu, in our particular canyon situation, is greater than I think you have allowed for.

Secondly, there are various ways in which a comparison between our new Museum and the conditions that applied in the old Museum, or at Sutton Place, are misleading. Thus, the influence that the number of visitors (so vastly greater than the old Museum) has a marked bearing on both temperature and humidity. But more serious is the effect of the spotlights which illuminate the paintings and furniture. The lights are on during the day and off at night, and this makes a considerable fluctuation over the 24-hour period.

memorandum to : J Paul Getty
17 January 1975
page 3

Conclusion

I have delayed sending this report for two reasons. Firstly, I was anxious to obtain the fullest possible reports from the curators and conservators. Secondly, I would like to ask you to discuss the contents of these reports with David Rinne while he is at Sutton Place. David is familiar with the history of this matter and is also technically qualified to comment on the conditions thought necessary in the galleries.

When you have had a chance to consider these reports, I will be grateful if you will let me have your comments.

Stephen Garrett

SG/jd

Enclosures :

Report, photographs and drawings by Judith Meller
Conservator of Paintings

Report and photographs by Gillian Wilson
Curator of Decorative Arts

Extract from "Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art" by J H Plenderlieth