

# BERGER ART CONSERVATION, INC.

(212) 861-2639 1014 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

May 15, 1978

Miss Marguerite Pettet  
Planting Fields Foundation  
P.O. Box 58  
Oyster Bay, N.Y. 11771

Dear Miss Pettet:

As promised I came to Planting Fields on Saturday, May 13th in order to finish my restoration work on the murals in the Breakfast Room. For two days my wife and I added the finishing touches, sprayed the walls and cleaned up the room. We also did something extra: we painted the skirting board which was not part of the murals, simply because it looked dirty and neglected.

To my great disappointment I found that the painting was defaced and my work destroyed either by vandalism or the insensitivity of a plasterer. As a result, an area of the sky about 48" by 18", is now covered by white plaster. Since the sky was air-brushed on a light yellow background without any sharp lines to preserve the atmosphere of soft, moving, clouds, and with a mixture of several colors, it has become almost impossible, or at least very time-consuming, to cover up this huge damaged area which comprises over 10% of the sky. Indeed, it might be necessary to do the whole ceiling over again.

This action of the plasterer might have been well intentioned. However, it demonstrates a total lack of understanding of his own craft, if not mine. Any painter or plasterer deserving his name must know two things:

- a) That such a crack in the ceiling or wall of an old building is bound to re-appear within a year or two,
- b) That it is almost impossible to satisfactorily match a patch of this size in smooth paint.

To repair the action of the plasterer, which in the long run is utterly useless, the following would have to be done:

- 1) The top part and railing which were removed from the scaffold when I completed the sky and had to reach the walls would have to be reinstalled,
- 2) The birds and the walls of the breakfast room would have to be covered with plastic again to protect them during the spraying of the ceiling with paint,
- 3) Most, if not all of the ceiling repainted and sprayed to become uniform again.

As stated in my letter of June 5, 1977 (p.2, #7) I would like to point

out again that a certain amount of cracking, deterioration, and even paintlosses will have to be accepted as an inevitable result of the conditions under which this mural is exhibited. All over the world cracks in murals are being accepted as a natural part of their make-up, and the Sistine Chapel is an excellent example.

May I also refer you to my letter of October 17th, 1977, in which I urged you among other important conservation measures to put drapes on the windows to prevent direct sunlight from damaging the murals.

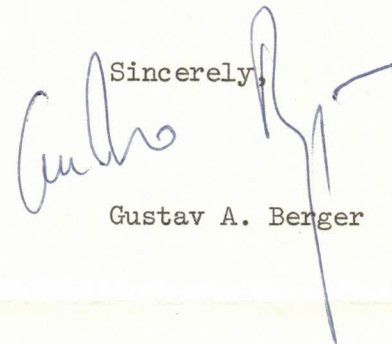
The humidifier has to be cleaned and kept dry till the winter in order to prevent the growth of algae and mold.

I sincerely hope that in the future a conservator will be consulted before any changes or decisions regarding these or other paintings are made. I, for one, refuse to be responsible for 'repairs' or any other measures on which I am not consulted.

Mr. Jones was kind enough to show me the "Tea Room". In a separate letter I will send my report on the examination of the murals by Everet Shinn. These paintings are not in very good condition, and the causes of their decay should be investigated and counteracted before the winter.

Thanking you and the rest of staff of Coe Hall for your hospitality which made my work possible. I sincerely hope that a way can be found to bring my work to a satisfactory conclusion both to myself and those who have the Preservation of Planting Fields at heart.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gustav A. Berger', with a long, sweeping vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.

Gustav A. Berger