

31 October, 1990

TO: John Franklin Miller
FROM: Margaret A. Tramontine
RE: Mrs. Seiberling's Paintings - Conservation

As you know, three of Mrs. Seiberling's paintings have been taken to the ICA lab for conservation treatment. In addition, we have also taken her painting of the London Plane Tree Allee, which was treated last year in preparation for the exhibit, to the lab for visual comparison needs with regard to the other three works.

SH#1.85

It is intended that all four paintings will be photographed, and that the photographs will be used to print museum notecards for sale in the Stan Hywet Gift Shop.

To our knowledge Mrs. Seiberling did not varnish any of her oil paintings. Consequently, there is no protection of the paint layers as varnish does indeed create a barrier to dirt, spills, light stains, etc. At the time of conservation on the London Plane Tree Allee, we (Helen Mar and myself) discussed this and decided for safe exhibition purposes to add a light coat of varnish to the work as a protection measure. Varnish can be removed rather safely except for areas of inpainting, which prove more difficult in varnish removal. We knew that this addition of varnish was a compromise to Mrs. Seiberling's intent. (I have no idea why she did not varnish her works; aesthetic preference or simply did not want to take the time to do so, who knows)

Helen Mar called yesterday, concerned that if we did varnish the three paintings when treatment is completed, that we would be compromising the artist's original intent. Varnish does make the pigments appear more saturated, so there is a slight visual difference. She asked whether or not we wanted to do this, and was concerned that we all may have altered the artist's intent, and that possibly we should not varnish any of her paintings and in fact remove the varnish from the London Plane Tree Allee.

At the time, we felt we made the correct decision, even though we were aware of the compromise that we were making. Considering the location of the Art Museum exhibition and the lack of human security in the area (their auditorium), and the use of only a light, relatively matt finish varnish, I felt that this varnishing was acceptable. It is a question between preservation of the object and compromise of artist intent.

We must make a decision concerning whether or not to varnish any of Mrs. Seiberling's paintings as most of our continuing paintings conservation will be concentrated on her works. We

must make this decision NOW, and your input is needed. I told Helen Mar that I would speak to you about this issue and get back to her this week, as she is trying to complete the reports on the paintings and get the estimates off to us as soon as possible.

Please respond.

The paintings at the lab to be treated, and then photographed for "publication" include:

1. "October Winds," 1937 - view of the West Lookout across the West Terrace; on permanent exhibition in the Morning Room.
2. "View of the Manor Front," 1934 - view from a south angle, showing the Solarium; on permanent exhibition in the Morning Room.
3. "English Garden," c. 1934 - view of the Water Goddess, unfinished painting; resides in painting storage at Stan Hywet Hall.

SHH 1.114

SHH 1.121

SHH 1.76