



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

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**OU Foundation and The University of Oklahoma Challenge Threat to Break Internationally
Lauded Art Sharing Settlement**

The following joint statement is released by OU Foundation President and CEO Guy Patton and The University of Oklahoma President Joseph Harroz, Jr.

In 2016, the OU Foundation and the University of Oklahoma's Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art established a model for how to fairly and justly settle modern day art restitution cases. That standard has been praised worldwide by the international cultural community. The written and signed settlement agreement, which ensured Camille Pissarro's *Shepherdess Bringing in Sheep* (1886) would remain in the public domain and honor its prior good faith owners, was reached with a French claimant, Leone Meyer, who now inexplicably seeks to break it.

The mutual agreement was achieved with the assistance of Agnes Peresztegi, who was with the World Jewish Congress (WJC) - Commission for Art Recovery at the time, and worked for Ronald Lauder, who was then President of the WJC. Pursuant to the agreement that gave title to Ms. Meyer, since 2016 the painting has been on public display at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and is scheduled to return to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art (FJJMA) in 2021. The piece is accompanied by a plaque describing the painting's ownership history. Under the terms of the original agreement, after three years at FJJMA, it will return to France for public display as it rotates between a French public institution and FJJMA every three years to continue telling the story of its WWII history, its subsequent good faith ownership and the donation of the painting in 2000 to the OU Foundation by the Weitzenhoffer Family to be displayed at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum at the University of Oklahoma.

In reaching the settlement in 2016, Ms. Meyer expressed gratitude to the OU Foundation for its graciousness, kindness, sensitivity and accommodation of her family heritage. At Ms. Meyer's and the Foundation's joint request - the U.S. federal court entered an order confirming the settlement, and the courts of France thereafter entered an order likewise recognizing it as final and non-appealable. The agreement was heralded as a first-of-its-kind U.S.-France international art sharing agreement.

A critical element of the mutual agreement was to guarantee that the artwork would remain on public view in perpetuity, rotating on a regular schedule between a museum in France and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. This was important to the OU Foundation and University, and based on her prior comments, also to Ms. Meyer, so that students, art lovers and the general public, both in France and Oklahoma, could learn and experience the beauty and historical memories that this painting contributes to the world.

Following entry of the U.S. and French court orders, the parties entered into a loan agreement with the Musée d'Orsay which incorporated the settlement agreement terms and conditions, along with a letter from Ms. Meyer's lawyer, confirming that per the settlement agreement the Pissarro painting must return to the FJJMA for public display in 2021.

But now, after four years of public display in France that abides with the agreement, Ms. Meyer has inexplicably rushed to French court demanding the Pissarro painting not go on public display at the FJJMA. Contrary to Ms. Meyer's new lawyer's belated allegations, French policy and law on art restitution matters – which have been in place since 1945 – have not changed as to modern day art restitution claims. Most importantly, neither nor does U.S. nor French law allow for settlement agreements to be undone. And, as was brought to the U.S. court's attention when Ms. Meyer filed her lawsuit, in the 1950s a Swiss court had previously ruled that a subsequent good faith owner had superior title to the Meyer family. The Meyer family did not appeal this prior decision or otherwise report the painting as still belonging to them. And, as the historical research revealed, even after obtaining the Swiss order, the then good faith owner offered the Meyer family an opportunity to recover the painting but they refused and the painting was subsequently sold.

For all the good faith that the OU Foundation and the University of Oklahoma have extended to Ms. Meyer, it is disappointing that she is actively working to renege on the agreement lauded by the international arts world, and attempting to deprive Oklahomans from experiencing this artwork for themselves and learning about its past.

We are confident that the U.S. and French courts will agree that in both Oklahoma and France, we must honor the past and respect mutual bona fide agreements we have previously reached with each other.

We are ready to challenge this unwarranted threat in U.S. and French courts.

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