

25 January 2012

NGV corrects details of Bonington investigation

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) today outlined details of its investigations into the missing, now reported stolen, Richard Bonington painting *Low Tide at Boulogne* (1818-28).

Media reports today erroneously suggested that the NGV has done very little to recover the work during the last decade.

Gerard Vaughan, Director NGV said: "All appropriate protocols and processes were followed as the Gallery sought to locate the work, including discussions with the Trustees and Arts Ministry from 2003 with further advice to the Government, police and media from 2003–2004.

"Naturally the NGV wished to exhaust every possible avenue to locate the work within the Collection before moving finally to insurance processes. This was an unusual situation with tens of thousands of artworks crated up or sealed in wrapping or boxes."

In 1999 the NGV moved all of its 65,000 artworks in preparation for redeveloping the NGV International premises on St Kilda Road and building The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square.

From 2002 the NGV initiated an inventory check on works which had been relocated and stored. As the check progressed, it became clear by late 2002 that the Bonington painting could not be located and a major search was immediately set in motion with the support of the NGV Council of Trustees, in the expectation that the painting had possibly been mis-filed rather than stolen, and would be located.

In 2003 the Government was advised of the situation, as were the police and media in 2004. NGV Management and Trustees agreed that the best approach was to continue the exhaustive search to see if the work might still be found within the Collection.

In 2004, as a key post redevelopment project, a major stocktake was planned. This was to be a multi-year program with every detail in every record of each work in the collection being checked and rechecked. It was felt that notwithstanding the NGV's public statements in 2004 that the work was "missing", there was still a chance it might be located.

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The paintings section of the stocktake, which was extremely comprehensive, was finally concluded in early 2011, and it was at this time that the Council of Trustees resolved that the work is no longer in the NGV's Collection and reported it as "stolen" (rather than missing) to the Victorian Government. It was judged to be the right moment to make an insurance claim.

Vaughan said: "As a part of what was the most comprehensive stocktake in the Gallery's history we have implemented the best possible security measures to protect artworks.

"This was an unusual situation linked to our redevelopment program. The very small size of this work rendered it particularly vulnerable in the moving process. All appropriate protocols and processes were followed in regard to this issue.

"Current security and storage procedures are completely adequate as we go forward."

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