

2 May 2012

IMPORTANT 17th CENTURY MASTERPIECE UNVEILED Nicolas Poussin | *The Crossing of the Red Sea*

The National Gallery of Victoria today unveiled Nicolas Poussin's *The Crossing of the Red Sea* after an intensive 12 month conservation project returning the 17th Century French masterpiece much closer to its original appearance. This important project was generously sponsored by BNP Paribas Australia and the BNP Paribas Foundation in Paris.

Dr Gerard Vaughan, Director, NGV said: "After nearly two years off display I am delighted to unveil Poussin's magnificent masterpiece *The Crossing of the Red Sea*. This world-renowned work, acquired by the NGV in 1948 through the Felton Bequest, has been meticulously and successfully restored by Carl Villis, Conservator European Paintings before 1800, NGV.



"The restoration has revealed much about the artists's magnificent use of colour and light gradation. Now that the project is complete, I encourage everyone to come and see this majestic work on display once again," said Dr Vaughan.

Carl Villis, Conservator European Paintings before 1800, NGV said: "This has been a long and challenging restoration project, but also a very rewarding one. Before the treatment began we carried out an extensive technical examination of the painting, which revealed a number of troubling issues relating to the surface of the painting. In particular, the upper half of the painting had suffered from past cleaning attempts, resulting in the loss of several important details.

"Fortunately the rediscovery in 2009 of a long-lost replica - painted around 50 years later than the original - showed us just how different Poussin's sky once looked. Using this high-quality replica as a guide, we have been able to reinstate some of those missing details. For the first time in generations we can see Poussin's wonderful painting in something closer to its original appearance."

Throughout the project, many online visitors followed the restoration stages via entries authored by Mr Villis at ngv.vic.gov.au.

Dr Vaughan said: "On behalf of the NGV I would like to thank both the BNP Paribas Foundation in Paris and Didier Mahout, the CEO of BNP Paribas Australia, for their generosity, enthusiasm and commitment to this important project."

This full-scale restoration project of one of the NGV's most valuable paintings began in early 2011, a celebratory year for both the NGV and BNP Paribas Group, who celebrated their 150th and 130th anniversary years respectively.

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NGV NEWS

Didier Mahout, CEO, BNP Paribas Australia & New Zealand said: “BNP Paribas and the BNP Paribas Foundation were delighted to take the opportunity to partner with the NGV on one of the most significant old master paintings in the country which also marked an important milestone in history for our group, our 130th anniversary in Australia when work began on this special project in 2011.

“Our partnership with the NGV forms part of our strong and active commitment to economic, social and environmental responsibility both in Australia and around the world.”

In addition, the spectacularly carved gilt frame commissioned for the painting c.1710, was also conserved by NGV Frames and Furniture Conservator MaryJo Lelyveld. The frame treatment included reinstating small losses to the ornately carved decorative elements, most notably along the sight edge of the image area, allowing visitors to the Gallery to view one of the finest examples of Regence framing in a more completed state.

MaryJo Lelyveld, Conservator, Frames and Furniture, NGV said: “The single impression we have when looking at this frame is of an intricately worked border of solid gold. This is a conscious intention, to take the simple materials of wood, chalk, animal glue, plant resins and extremely thin leaves of gold and create the illusion of something of much greater material worth. The value of the frame lies in the success of this illusion, and with the frame on *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, this illusion reaches its pinnacle.”

Poussin is recognised as one of the greatest French painters of the 17th Century, known for his dramatic and emotional story-telling expressed through grand gesture and pose. *The Crossing of the Red Sea* displays Poussin’s unique balance of colour and composition. The painting depicts an episode from the Old Testament Book of Exodus, where Moses performs the miracle of parting the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to escape the pursuing Egyptians, who subsequently drown.

The companion piece to *The Crossing of the Red Sea* is *The Adoration of the Golden Calf*, which belongs to the National Gallery in London. Poussin painted these two works together in 1633–34 for the Turin collector Amedeo dal Pozzo; for over 300 years these two paintings were kept side by side, most particularly in the Radnor Collection at Longford Castle in England, from the early 18th Century until 1948.

A fascinating publication has been produced to accompany this important restoration project of Nicolas Poussin’s *The Crossing of the Red Sea*. The publication is available at NGV Shop for \$14.95.

Nicolas Poussin’s *The Crossing of the Red Sea* is on display at NGV International, level 2, 16th-18th Century Galleries. Open Wed–Mon. **FREE ENTRY**

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NGV Conservation Sponsor: BNP Paribas Australia and the BNP Paribas Foundation

About BNP Paribas Corporate Philanthropy

The corporate philanthropy policy of the BNP Paribas Group is managed by the BNP Paribas Foundation, the corner stone of the Group’s philanthropy initiatives for the past 25 years. It is centered on 5 areas of activity: culture, social inclusion, education, health and the environment.

Today, BNP Paribas Corporate Philanthropy is getting concrete through more than 500 programs all around the world, managed via a network of 10 foundations or initiated directly by countries and businesses.

Image credit:

Nicolas Poussin. *The Crossing of the Red Sea* c. 1634, oil on canvas, 155.6 x 215.3 cm.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1948.