

cc Bp

THYSSEN - PRESENTATION

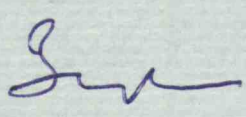
I have the gravest misgivings about the "saleability" of the Thyssen collection.

It could be presented as a stunning bargain for Britain. And it would be easier to sell if it were to go to Birmingham - as the regeneration of a regional centre and one of the world's great cities. But it will not, I fear, be seen like that by:

- the arts lobby - each constituent part of which will grumble loud and long about how much better use they could have made of the money
- similarly every other pressure group, and especially the poverty lobby; in this respect the timing could not be worse
- those who will find objection to paying what they see as a vast amount of money to an already loaded German whose family made its money out of armaments

There are so many presentational problems that you will need to give the most careful thought, in taking a decision, about how to "sell" it to the British public.

mb



BERNARD INGHAM

10 May 1988



C

EXTRACT FROM LETTER FROM NEIL MACGREGOR

There is, however, one central point with which I must open: the response of all those who work in museums. For several years now, the Minister has been obliged to state in public that there is simply not money available for the Government to meet its obligations to maintain the buildings of our major public galleries; to house great university collections like the Courtauld; to increase, through the University Grants Commission, help to institutions like the Fitzwilliam and the Ashmolean; or to provide adequate purchase grants. All such institutions (and they are too numerous to list) have been obliged to seek private support on the basis that the Government is unable to help. Even the most successful are still unable to display their holdings 'at a high standard'.

The reaction of trustees and staff responsible for underfunded museums and galleries to the decision to spend a huge sum of money on a foreign collection (which will not even be fully owned by H.M.G.) may be imagined, and is unlikely to be either favourable or muted. The level of running costs funding proposed for the Thyssen collection must be likely to precipitate vociferous and articulate protest. Perhaps more important, what will be the reaction of those who might have become benefactors? How can it now be credibly represented to them that the Government is unable to meet the costs of collections for the most part given free to the British people? Who will persuade Denis Mahon, Lilian Browse or the Duke of Sutherland — again, to name only a tiny sample — that they would not be better advised to follow the Thyssen example and offer their collections for negotiation around the world? And who will explain to benefactors — again like Denis Mahon — why in this instance the Government intends actually to prohibit sale? These are difficult and perhaps familiar questions, but they are exacerbated in an extreme degree by the present proposal, which in itself raises some questions and many misgivings.