

Die must take advantage of this possibility. We lost Gullbenkian's collection to Portugal - because we did not act in time.

Fine Minister  
If you agree, I will act  
then to Richard Luce for advice  
ESP 2/2

SIR PETER SMITHERS 6911-VICO MORCOTE

I am happy to see Claude SWITZERLAND

Hankes - Drielsma. Telephone:- (091) 69-19-73

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

My dear Margaret,

Ref: Richard Luce  
27th February 1988.

it is some years since I last wrote to you, understanding all too well your problem with time and effort. But the matter of this letter is of such immediate importance for our country that I have no hesitation in asking you to give it your blessing.

The Thyssen Collection of Old and Modern Masters is the most important private collections of paintings in the world, valued last year at over one billion dollars. My neighbour Heinie Thyssen has been searching for some time for a solution to its permanent disposition. Its present location is unsatisfactory. About ten proposals have been made from various countries, of which three are receiving serious consideration.

Last year I dined 'en famille' with Heinie on his birthday and discussed with him and Tita the possibility that the Collection might find a permanent home in England. Both Heinie and Tita seemed to think the idea interesting, but it appears their subsequent enquiries in England received a negative and discouraging response. Astonishing!

The country which ultimately receives this Collection will make by far the greatest Fine Arts acquisition of all time. I discussed this recently with Claude Hankes-Drielsma, and he has since been studying the feasibility of an English venue. He is convinced that with a positive and constructive approach and with appropriate support, the financing of a Museum in England to house the Collection could be achieved. This would involve a major contribution from the private sector. For a location there are various possibilities, amongst them the centre of the Inner City Problem Area. The Collection would become the property of a Foundation and would be permanently located in England. In effect Britain would acquire a billion dollar asset of increasing value for a small fraction of its present worth. I need not emphasize to you the immense importance, socially and financially, of such a coup!

Yesterday Claude was invited to lunch with Heinie to discuss the matter. Heinie was surprised and delighted to hear that the possibility of an English venue did after all exist. It was clear from his reactions that, though we are late in the field, he would welcome a British proposal, but that we would have to get our act together quickly.

I feel that your known support for this project would certainly have great weight in the raising of funds and in Heinie's final decision. Given the immense importance to Britain of such an acquisition, I hope you may find a few moments to discuss the matter with Claude Hankes-Drielsma who has charge of the negotiations with Heinie. He will of course be in touch with Richard Luce in due course. Is this not a truly exciting possibility?

*James*  
*Peter*  
Peter Smithers.

Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.