

Vatican art exhibition's sponsor has him smoking

Smoke gets in my eyes whenever I look forward to the Vatican art exhibit that will be shown next summer at the Art Institute of Chicago.

That's because the institute, from the time the exhibit opens July 21 until it closes Oct. 16, will become a crude outpost in "Marlboro Country."

Let me explain.

A story from Vatican City in last Sunday's Sun-Times stated:

"AFTER TWO YEARS of restoration, six months of packing, and a last-minute flurry of protests by Italian art historians, 237 Vatican art treasures are ready to be shipped to the United States for a year's display in New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

"The exhibit, called 'The Vatican Collections: the Papacy and Art,' includes works by Leonardo da Vinci, Caravaggio, Raphael and Giotto, as well as Greek and Roman sculpture. It marks the first time the Vatican has sent a large number of its pieces abroad."

The article went on to describe the extraordinary care used to guarantee the treasures' safe arrival and return.

"The works are put into an 'environmental chamber' three weeks before they are shipped to the United States, and the temperature and humidity are gradually changed to match what they are in New York. Silica gel is put into the packing case, keeping the relative humidity constant en route. The temperature in the airplane's cargo hold is controlled."

As a three-time visitor to the Vatican museums, I'm delighted that Chicago art lovers will have an opportunity to see firsthand some of the works from the Vatican collections. I'm also pleased to learn that these irreplaceable pieces are being carted with care.

Still, as I said, it all makes smoke get in my eyes—and I'll tell you why.

Months ago, I received from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York an impressive envelope bearing the papal emblem. Inside was a press release announcing the "first major loan exhibition of art from the Vatican to the United States."

It was Page 2 of the release that brought tears to my eyes. There, it was reported that "the exhibition's tour of the United States is sponsored by Philip Morris Incorporated through a generous [\$3 million] grant. . . . Pan Am [the airline] has been designated by the Metropolitan Museum as the official carrier of the exhibition by virtue of its transportation assistance."

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE "for the corporate support . . . given by Philip Morris and Pan Am," Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum, said the Philip Morris contribution was "the most generous ever made to an art exhibit by a corporation."

Grateful for the gratitude, George Weissman, chairman of the board at Philip Morris, said:

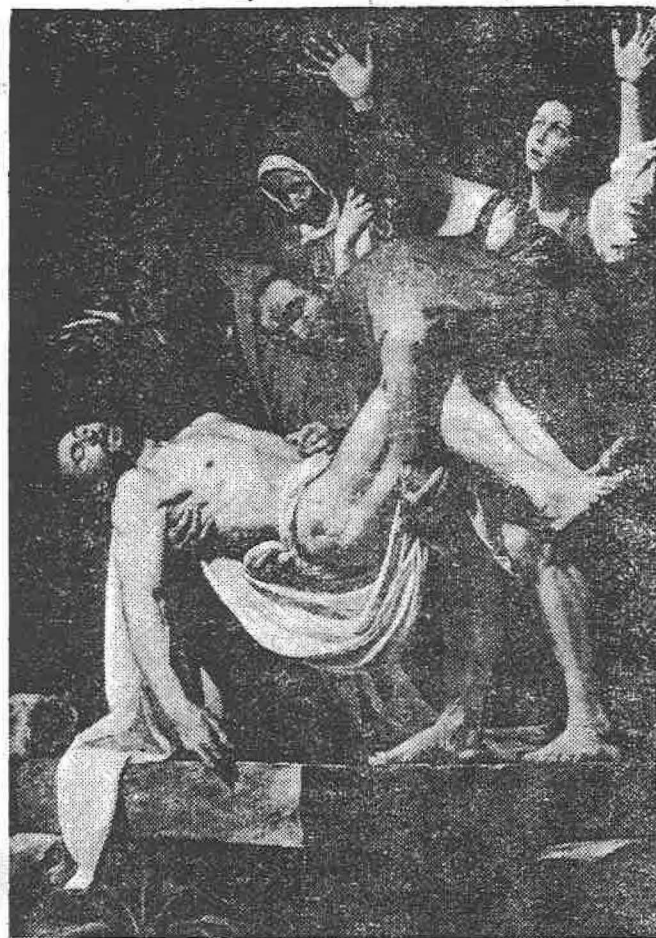
"We at Philip Morris see this great exhibition as truly historic, not only for the world of art but also in the realm of American corporate support of the arts. We regard our sponsorship as a significant escalation of such support, and we are proud of the role we are playing."

This is not the tobacco firm's first venture into corporate sponsorship of major events. It also has backed an exhibit titled, "A Stroke of Genius," in Australia, the "Champions of American Sport" exhibition at the Chicago Historical Society and the Virginia Slims tennis tournament.

Corporate gifts of money to the arts has become a



VATICAN ART: Leonardo da Vinci's painting titled "St. Jerome" (left) and Caravaggio's "The Deposition of Christ"



are among the 237 art treasures from the Vatican that will be on display next summer at the Art Institute of Chicago.



Roy Larson

Religion Editor

controversial subject.

Writing in defense of such gifts in a 1978 Wall Street Journal article, Paul H. Elicker, president of SCM Corp., argued:

"It's a big plus if the first time a person hears or sees the SCM name, it's connected with sponsorship of an exhibition. And that recognition is enhanced if we sponsor superior exhibitions at prestigious institutions.

"Not that sponsor recognition is something recently dreamed up by corporations. The great patrons of the Renaissance—the Medicis and Pope Julius II—all sought recognition by associating themselves with the grandeur provided by great art and architecture."

THE MORAL of the story, Elicker concluded, is that "everyone benefits."

A British industrialist seconded this motion in another Journal piece. "You sponsor an arts event," he wrote, "and you get very good feedback from a quite important opinion-forming circle."

For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has been in the business of forming opinions. Generally, it has taken a

"pro-life" stance. Witness its current campaigns against abortion and nuclear war.

That's what makes the Vatican look so inconsistent when it lends its vast prestige to the Philip Morris firm, whose president in 1971 stated its rationale for gifts to the arts by saying, "It's a lot cheaper than taking out ads saying how great we think we are."

THANKS TO FEDERAL regulations, packages of Philip Morris, Virginia Slims, Parliament Lights, Benson & Hedges 100s and Marlboros carry a warning that makes it clear those products are not "pro-life." It says: "The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health."

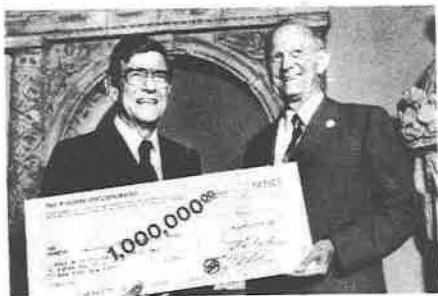
No one has looked into the mouths of more corporate gift-horses than Dr. Alan Blum, a former Chicago family physician who now edits the Medical Journal of Australia. As president of DOC (Doctors Ought to Care), founded in 1977, Blum has been waging a relentless war against the "subliminal advertising" of the world's cigarette makers.

Now, DOC needs a priest, one who will direct to the Vatican a few pointed questions about the moral dimension of the church's conferring respectability on a corporation whose products stink to high heaven.

Priceless sacred art deserves all the care the Vatican has given it. Of even greater value is the life of one person into whose nostrils God has breathed the breath of life.

UNITED STATES TOBACCO JOURNAL

PM shows generosity



George Weissman (l), chairman of Philip Morris Inc., presents outsized copy of \$1,000,000 check — the first of a \$3 million grant — to Douglas Dillon, board chairman of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The gift will help fund the United States tour of the first major show of art from the Vatican permitted outside Rome.

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