

The Washington Post

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16, 2005

MARYLAND

Understorms.
by 68.
Partly sunny.
by 70.

No. 254 R MD

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Roberts likely Face Fight Democrats battle as Futile

ALLEN
MILBANK
Post Staff Writers

...ats have decided that un-
is an unexpected devel-
the weeks ahead, they
nch a major fight to block
me Court nomination of
Roberts Jr., according to
Senate aides and party

...es of interviews in recent
than a dozen Democratic
and aides who are inti-
volved in deliberations
they said that they see no
that most Democratic sen-
prepared to expend politi-
in what is widely seen as a
t to derail the nomination.
h they expect to subject
Bush's nominee to tough
g at confirmation hear-



BY MICHAEL ROBINSON-CHAVEZ — THE WASHINGTON POST

A protester pleads his case to Maj. Yitzhak Nachmani, head of a military unit that scuffled with pullout foes at the Neve Dekalim settlement.

Eviction Notices Are Served in Gaza

Iraqis Fail To Meet Constitution Deadline

Lawmakers Approve Seven-Day Extension

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and OMAR FEKEIKI
Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD, Aug. 15 — Iraqi factional leaders failed to meet Monday's deadline for drafting a constitution in an often-rancorous debate that appeared to have widened rift among Shiite, Sunni, Kurdish and secular groups while slipping from a timeline pushed hard by the United States as it eyes troop withdrawals.

Unable to resolve differences on such major issues as the role of religion by the midnight deadline, political leaders turned to Iraq's transitional parliament for a one-week extension, winning unanimous agreement with just 23 minutes to spare.

Iraqi officials presented the extension as success. They smiled and shook hands among themselves and with U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, who strolled on the floor of parliament ahead of the late-night vote.

"This to my mind is real democracy, an

Letter From Worcester

Plague Art Resonates in Post-9/11 World

WORCESTER, Mass.

Come to this fine and hilly old industrial city and find a meditation on terror rendered in Renaissance and baroque oils.

There are paintings of babies seeking succor from plague-ridden mothers, of the saintly tending to the mortally ill, and of men and women recoiling from death's touch. Franco Mormando, a soft-spoken former Jesuit, has assembled this exhibit — "Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500 to 1800" — at the Worcester Art Museum, and it features a great many artistic worthies, from Tiepolo to Canaletto to Van Dyck.

But what gives it a haunting and modern resonance is the evocation of contagion and helplessness, and the fear that is their handmaiden.

"For 300 years plague hung over the lives of Europeans like an omnipresent cloud," said Mormando, who is an Italian studies professor at Boston College. "I had just begun assembling this exhibit when September 11th came along and we were living in this state of utter helplessness."

He nodded toward the paintings, arrayed in cool and shadowed halls. "The preoccupations began to feel very familiar."

In an age of subway bombs and anthrax and avian flu, when thousands of Americans pass waking hours trying to manage their fears, Mormando and three fellow curators — from the University of Massachusetts, Clark University and the College of the Holy Cross — have fashioned a strikingly timely exhibit from 37 paintings drawn from European and American collections. One might argue that Renaissance Italy is so distant as to offer little insight into our own anxieties, Mormando acknowledged.

But the corrosive anxiety in these paintings feels current.

"The specter of terrorist-disseminated plagues, the anthrax and smallpox has kept us in a state of collective anxiety, if not panic," Mormando said. "We have come to realize, as they did, that fear is our new reality."

"The question," he continued, "is how this fear forces us to change our reality. For a brief time we had confidence that science would overcome anything. Now we return to something older."

The plague paintings are characteristically Italian, the gruesome nature of the subject never extinguishing the beauty and delicacy of the oils chosen, or the artist's appreciation of classical form. A large and handsome canvas by Giovanni Martinelli titled "Memento Mori" ("Remember, you shall die") hangs in the first room of the exhibition. Handsomely attired young dandies and two women make merry around a table laden with grapes and peaches and berry tarts when from the dark shadows a skeleton approaches holding an hourglass. A



Martinelli's "Memento Mori" is in the Worcester Art Museum show "Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague."

young man, eyes wide, takes on death's gray pallor, and a young woman stares at him with a palpable gasp of horror.

Plague was the visitor half expected for hundreds of years. While historical accounts tend to dwell on grand outbreaks — the civilization-altering Black Death of 1348 and the epidemics of 1575 and 1630 — nary a year passed without plague breaking out in some walled town or port city.

"It's no exaggeration to say that when the Italians were not living through the plague they were anxiously awaiting its return," Mormando said. "There was no such thing as a 'little outbreak.' When the plague came there was no escape."

Mormando, 49, grew up in an Italian neighborhood in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge in downtown Manhattan and came up with the idea for this exhibit — which runs through Sept. 25 — from his work in Renaissance and baroque art. He had helped rediscover a painting by Tintoretto that depicted the raising of the leper Lazarus from the dead, one of the most spectacular of Jesus' miracles.

"I discovered that many paintings depicted Lazarus, because he was the plague saint," Mormando said. "Curiosity got the better of me, and as I researched I found art filled with references to the plague, to the point of consuming preoccupation."

Mormando looked for clues with a detective's eye. Bernardo Strozzi paints a natu-

ralistic scene of a young woman pouring water from a brass jug into a poor boy's bowl while a crippled old man awaits his turn. It's an allusion to the bubonic plague, which visited an unquenchable thirst upon its victims. The charity of those willing to brave the plague was considered a church-sanctified corporal work of mercy.

Other clues are easier to discern. Plague paintings often depict a man holding his nose in an attempt to forestall the stench from the pus-filled bodies of the dying. (Anyone who smelled the strange odors near Manhattan's Ground Zero in the days after the towers collapsed and burned would feel a twinge of horrible recognition.) It is perhaps curious that, given his subject, Mormando seems by nature an optimist. He believes in art's transcendence and its ability to illuminate the human condition. In this he is not so remote from the Renaissance Italians, who conceived of art as a spiritual remedy in the face of unspeakable horror.

"In Italy, the prevailing ethos was that you painted for catharsis," he said, "and to give people hope through beauty."

But as Mormando researched plague art in the days after Sept. 11, he noticed less salutary parallels. When a pandemic descended upon them, Italians gave security precedence over all else. There were quarantines and censorship — town fathers feared that talk of plague might wreck their economy,

much as the modern world delayed releasing word for fear of the economic rich fled in sealed carriages, and the poor and art found themselves locked in odorous and wretched hospitals known as lazarettos.

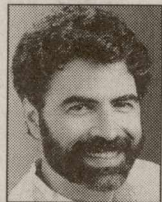
Most accepted the pestilence was on his sinful and disobedient hope was to find a saintly heavenly intercession.

"The popes, the cardinals viewed medicine as well as the ultimate cause of the plague," Mormando said. "It was a national sin."

He paused and added that the terrible time was evil like to destroy the world, a simplistic and self-consoling. So saints cried, peasants painted — and still anxious. A plague cloud while tens of millions prepared this exhibit and a very modern world around Mormando despair?

He shook his head. He had recently after 20 years a student of his church — but he had done faith.

"Plague has been with us since we lived," he said. "How we can define us. Our find inspiration."



It "began to feel very familiar," curator Franco Mormando says.

Worcester

Plague Art Resonates in Post-9/11 World

WORCESTER, Mass. — In a fine and hilly old industrial town, you can find a meditation on death in Renaissance and Baroque paintings.

Paintings of babies seeking help from plague-ridden mothers, of the mortally ill, and of people recoiling from death's embrace. In a room, a soft-spoken former curator assembled this exhibit — "Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500 to 1800" — at the Worcester Art Museum, and it features a number of works by worthy artists, from Tiepolo to Rembrandt.

It has a haunting and modern quality, a evocation of contagion and death, and the fear that is their hand-

plague hung over the lives of people, "an omnipresent cloud," says a curator who is an Italian studies professor at the College. "I had just been to the exhibit when Septem-ber 11 came and we were living in a time of helplessness."

Heard the paintings, arrayed in the museum's grand halls. "The preoccupations feel very familiar."

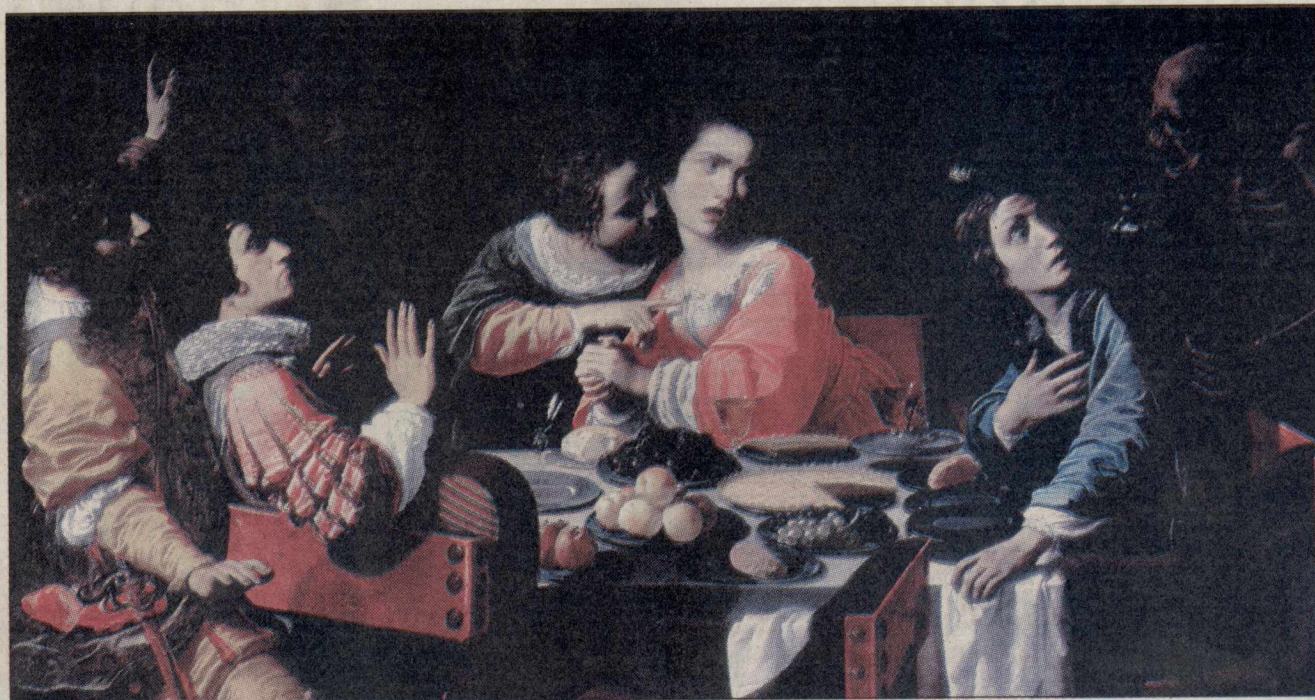
Downy bombs and anthrax attacks in thousands of Americans are trying to manage their lives, and three fellow curators at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the College of the Holy Cross, have chosen a strikingly timely exhibit drawn from European collections. One might think of the distance of Italy as so distant as to be out of our own anxieties, but it is not. "We have lived through it," he said.

He has anxiety in these paint-

ings of terrorist-disseminated anthrax and smallpox has kept a collective anxiety, if not panic, in our minds. "We have come to realize that fear is our new reality."

"It is how we change our reality. For a long time we had confidence that science would solve anything. Now we return to a sense of helplessness."

Paintings are characterized by the gruesome nature of the subject, the beauty and the horror, or the artist's apocalyptic form. A large and dramatic painting by Giovanni Martinelli titled "Memento Mori" ("Remember, you will die") is in the first room of the exhibit. It shows a young dandy in a red and white outfit, surrounded by a table of food, including peaches and berries, and a dark shadow of a skeleton holding an hourglass. A



NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART

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much as the modern Chinese government delayed releasing word of the SARS virus for fear of the economic devastation. The rich fled in sealed carriages to country villas, and the poor and artisan classes as often found themselves locked in their homes or in odorous and wretched public plague hospitals known as lazarettos.

Most accepted the church's insistence that the pestilence was God's punishment on his sinful and disobedient children. The hope was to find a saint who might offer heavenly intercession.

"The popes, the cardinals, the bishops, viewed medicine as well and good, but the ultimate cause of the plague was sinfulness," Mormando said. "It was a simplistic explanation."

He paused and added: "Now our leaders react to the terrible times by telling us the evil like to destroy the good. That, too, is a simplistic and self-consoling answer."

So saints cried, peasants prayed, artists painted — and still anxiety hung like a miasmic cloud while tens of millions died. As he prepared this exhibit and glanced at the jittery modern world around him, did Mormando despair?

He shook his head. He left the Jesuit order recently after 20 years, no longer confident of his church — but he has not abandoned faith.

"Plague has been with us and we've survived," he said. "How we behave in times of plague can define us. Out of horror we can find inspiration."

— Michael Powell



It "began to feel very familiar," curator Franco Mormando says.