

# Los Angeles Times

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Feedback: Let 'The Blue Boy' have his safe sojourn to London



Thomas Gainsborough's 1770 painting "Blue Boy." (Huntington Library)

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Regarding Christopher Knight's commentary [["Why experts fear return of 'The Blue Boy' to London"](#)] [July 6]: In fact, experts don't. Knight's story is deeply one-sided and misleading.

After several years of considerable examination and discussion, and after instituting a rigorous set of protocols, the Huntington has decided to lend Thomas Gainsborough's "The Blue Boy" to the National Gallery, London — but only upon expert advice and only under very specific,

restrictive conditions. The long-term well-being of this iconic work has always been the Huntington's guiding principle for any discussion about the possibility of a loan.

Knight's piece failed to capture the degree to which we have studied the matter that eventually led us to this important decision. The 2018 panel of conservators he cites met to study the painting's condition and to recommend a course of conservation treatment for it. They were not charged with advising on possible travel, but rather on the best plan of work to stabilize and respect the historic integrity of the work. We followed all of their recommendations regarding treatment.

In 2019 once most of the conservation work was complete, the Huntington convened a second panel of conservators and curators, specifically to advise us about possible travel. These were individuals from pre-eminent North American museums, all having similar collections and extensive experience with Old Master paintings. These professionals are all well-versed in best practices and the latest thinking around fine art transport for masterpieces of "The Blue Boy" caliber. The group was provided with the most up-to-date information about the painting's condition and what had been learned over the course of the extensive conservation project. The panel advised that the painting could be lent safely, but that it should go to one venue only, an institution of the highest caliber with stellar exhibition and conservation facilities and staff and that it should be transported in a state-of-the art, custom-made crate. We are scrupulously following all the panel's recommendations.

Thus, after exhaustive consideration, the Huntington has decided to loan our most iconic painting for this one occasion — the centennial of its departure from England, where it was last on display at the National Gallery — so that public and scholarly audiences across the Atlantic can view and study the painting post-restoration.

Great masterpieces have traveled from time to time, under very rigorous protocols. This one will as well. While we appreciate Knight's abiding interest in the work, his piece was one of omission: he simply did not report the full set of facts, and this resulted in misleading and inaccurate conclusions.

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