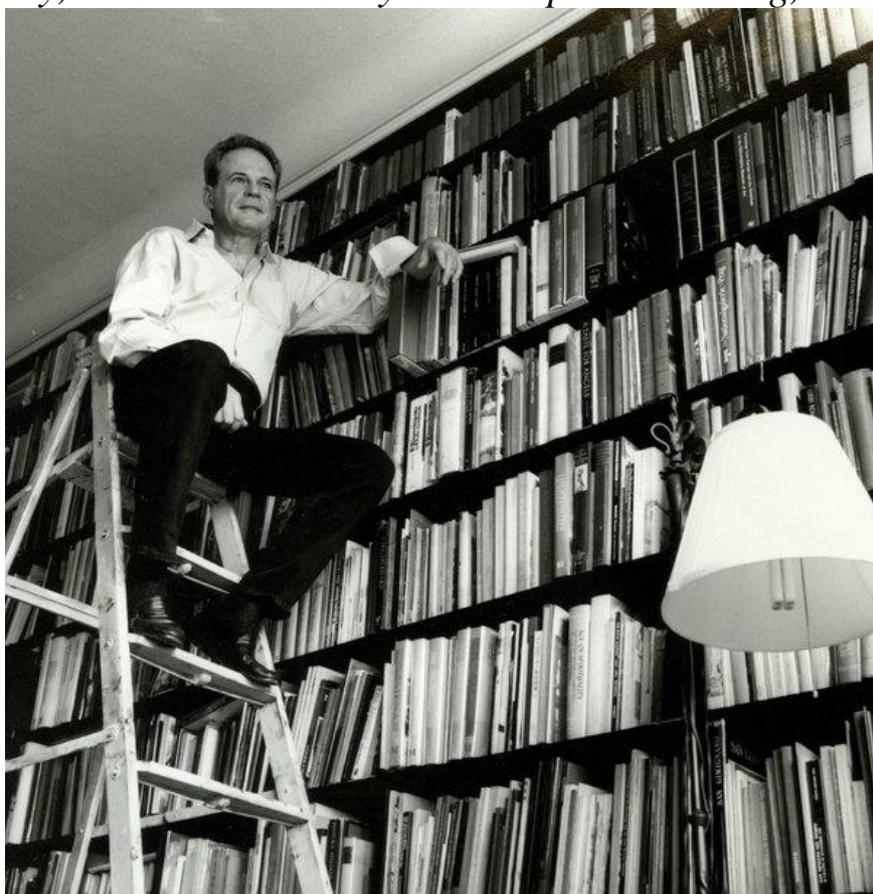


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Everett Fahy, Museum Authority on European Painting, Is Dead at 77



Everett Fahy in 1995, when he was chairman of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's European paintings department. Credit: Henry Bourne

By Richard Sandomir

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Everett Fahy, a prominent historian of Florentine painters from the late 15th and early 16th centuries who joined the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) as a young curator and left to run [the Frick Collection](#) before returning to the Met as its chairman of European paintings, died on April 23 in Davis, Calif. He was 77.

His brother, David, his only survivor, said the cause was complications of Parkinson's disease.

Mr. Fahy (pronounced fay) became the Met's curator in charge of European paintings, one of the museum's most prestigious departments, in his late 20s. One of his tasks was to reorganize the collection so that pictures were arranged by national schools, identified by walls that were painted in different dark colors.

"The most common reaction, even from people who have been here 30 years, is that we've cleaned the pictures," [Mr. Fahy told The New Yorker in 1971](#). "But it's the dark backgrounds — they've removed the old masters dinginess and given the paintings a kind of rich glow." He added, "Our Impressionist paintings now look the way people thought they did in the 19th century."

Writing in *The New York Times*, the critic John Canaday praised the reorganization for creating a "historical continuity" that went "beyond anything the Metropolitan has managed before."

The affable Mr. Fahy often rode his bicycle to work, filled his Upper West Side apartment with books and photographs, read voraciously, was close friends with the philanthropist Brooke Astor and freely shared his knowledge with colleagues and other scholars.

"If I was working on something from the 17th or 18th century," [Keith Christiansen, who succeeded Mr. Fahy in 2009](#) as the Met's chairman of European paintings, said in a telephone interview, "he'd say, 'Keith, have you seen this latest article?' 'Well, no, Everett, I actually haven't.'"

Mr. Fahy fueled his devotion to scholarship by writing articles, museum bulletins and, collaborating with other staff members, catalogs. One catalog, in 1973, offers rich descriptions of old masters paintings and drawings from a huge trove of art donated by Charles and Jayne Wrightsman.

Katharine Baetjer, curator of European paintings at the Met, said in an interview that this monumental catalog established Mr. Fahy as a "first-class scholar."

Mr. Fahy's first tenure with the Met coincided with [Thomas Hoving's](#) tumultuous one as director. A charismatic showman who turned the Met into a more populist institution, Mr. Hoving took a gamble by

acquiring [Velazquez's 1650 portrait](#) of his assistant, Juan de Pareja, in 1971 for \$5.5 million, an astonishing price at the time (the equivalent of about \$34 million today). A year later, The Times reported that the Met, to help defray the cost of buying the Velazquez, had quietly sold Rousseau's "[The Tropics](#)" for \$600,000 and van Gogh's "[The Olive Pickers](#)" for \$250,000 to a private gallery.

Mr. Fahy objected to selling the Rousseau, and that disagreement, Ms. Baetjer said, led him to leave the Met for the Frick in 1973.

Everett Philip Fahy Jr. was born on March 29, 1941, in Darby, Pa., about five miles southwest of Philadelphia. His father was a real estate agent and homebuilder; his mother, the former Dorothy Jermaka, was a homemaker.

As a youngster, Everett shared his parents' interests in plants and flowers and often explored the gardens in his neighborhood, his brother said. He also acted in school plays.

He studied English and chemistry at the University of Virginia, but a class in art history during his junior year altered his trajectory. At Harvard, where he earned his master's degree, he studied with the Italian Renaissance scholar [Sydney Freedberg](#).

Following a fellowship at I Tatti, a villa overlooking Florence that had been given to Harvard by the art historian Bernard Berenson, Mr. Fahy received a Ph.D. from Harvard for his thesis on [the Florentine painter Domenico Ghirlandaio](#), whose apprentices included a young Michelangelo. Mr. Fahy turned the dissertation into a book, "Some Followers of Domenico Ghirlandaio" (1975).

He was hired in 1968 by the Met as a consultant to Mr. Hoving on European paintings, but he left after a year.

"I was like a little golden boy whom nobody knew what to do with," he told The New Yorker. He taught at the New York University Institute of Fine Arts for a year before accepting Mr. Hoving's offer to become the Met's curator in charge of European paintings.

After leaving the Met a second time, he spent 13 years at the Frick, the former mansion of the industrialist Henry Clay Frick on the Upper East Side. During his tenure there, the museum expanded with a new reception hall and garden, increased the number of its exhibitions and had nearly all its paintings cleaned by the Met's head of conservation.

Ian Wardropper, the Frick's director, said in a telephone interview: "He was an excellent cook. At my one lunch with him at the Frick, he dressed the salad and tossed it himself. He was very particular about how he entertained. He was also a great raconteur."

While at the Frick, Mr. Fahy wrote the catalog for [“From Leonardo to Titian: Italian Renaissance Paintings From the Hermitage,”](#) a 1979 exhibition of paintings at the National Gallery of Art in Washington from the storied museum in what is now St. Petersburg, Russia. In a review of the show, John Russell of The Times called Mr. Fahy “one of our nimblest needlemen” for ably threading the works of Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, Andrea del Saito, Francesco Primaticcio and Jacopo da Pontormo into a cohesive narrative.

Mr. Fahy returned to the Met in 1986 as chairman of the museum’s department of European paintings and built a reputation for letting his curators do their jobs without much interference.

“He was a great administrator,” Ms. Baetjer said. “He saved us from a lot of boring work.”

In 2010, a year after Mr. Fahy’s retirement, he produced a lengthy study of Velazquez’s early-16th-century painting, [“Saint John the Baptist Bearing Witness.”](#) He concluded that its attribution — to a collaboration of the circle around Francesco Granacci, a student of Ghirlandaio’s — was incorrect. Rather, he said, it had been painted by Michelangelo, a friend of Granacci’s.

“I believe Michelangelo painted it in 1506, two years before he started on the Sistine ceiling,” [Mr. Fahy told ARTnews in 2010.](#)

Mr. Fahy’s belief has not been universally accepted, but he was “perfectly happy to put it out there,” Mr. Christiansen said.

“He’d been thinking about it for many years,” she added, “and was absolutely convinced of it.”

The Met did not change its attribution.

But skepticism did not bother Mr. Fahy. “With attributions, it’s not the number of people who agree with you,” he told ARTnews. “It’s the quality of their judgments.”