



AiA Art News-service



‘Stay of execution’ for art shippers as EU extends deadline for permits

A shortage of ECMT permits poses “huge concerns” for British art handlers in Europe

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22nd March 2019 17:37 GMT



Business as usual for British art handlers—but not for much longer © Fancycrave

The European Union agreed this week to allow UK art shippers and other luxury good hauliers to continue to enter the continent without a permit in the event of a no-deal Brexit—but only until the end of the year.

Describing the news as a “stay of execution”, Mike McGrellis, the transport manager at Gander & White, says the London-based shipping firm had failed to secure European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) permits on two occasions.

Gander & White first applied for a permit around 18 months ago and was automatically entered a second time after the initial application was unsuccessful. A severe shortage of permits—around 980 for 30,000 hauliers in the UK—means essential services such as food and medicine are given priority.

“Obviously we are at the back of the queue when it comes to principle services, but it was a huge concern when we were rejected again earlier this week,” McGrellis says. “We were looking at curtailing some of the trips we do, and possibly even cancelling some of them.”

McGrellis estimates 40% of Gander & White’s business comes from the continent, a shortfall he reckons could be recouped by increasing domestic services. “It’s not ideal,” he says. “The art industry is a global business, so we want to provide a one-stop shop for our clients who may be buying at auction in London and shipping to Paris or Brussels or elsewhere in Europe.”

One administratively demanding option Gander & White is considering “as a last resort” is to register some of its fleet in Paris, where the firm has a warehouse. “The more likely alternative is that we would cut off the European arm of the business and just concentrate on the domestic side,” McGrellis says.

The extended deadline now stretches to 31 December, but, after that, art shippers will be “back in the dark”, McGrellis says. “There’s no information and no answers. Unless the government negotiates some sort of trade deal for us between now and December, I can see us being back to square one again.”