

Bohm painting ruckus raised

By **Mary Ann Bragg**

BANNER STAFF

PROVINCETOWN — For now, the painting by American artist Max Bohm, “Study for Pilgrim Mural,” will stay where it is — behind the board of selectmen’s desk in Town Hall.

A flap has arisen over the idea of moving the oil painting, which shows a group of Pilgrim men in a wooded scene appearing to cast votes with a native American standing to the side.

Some say the painting depicts an important moment in the town’s history, the signing of the Mayflower Compact on Nov. 11, 1620, and therefore shouldn’t be moved.

Former selectmen and Provincetown native Mary-Jo Avellar said recently the painting has hung above the selectmen’s desk for more than half-a-century and therefore shouldn’t be moved.

Others question the motivation of Selectmen Sarah Peake for championing the idea of moving the painting, and wondering about the context in

which she made a comment about the lack of women in the artwork.

“I think it’s trying to change history,” Bohm’s granddaughter, Anne Packard, said on Monday. “What do the selectmen want to do next, take down the statute of Iwo Jima...because there’s no women in it. I think the selectmen were elected to run out the town’s business, not the taste of the paintings. If it offends Sarah Peake then that is too good damn bad. I’m furious.”

Packard, a painter, added that her feelings come not from being Bohm’s granddaughter but from having voted for Peake. “What’s next?” she said. “What’s the next thing? There will be one. Don’t they care about tradition? Does it only start when Sarah Peake moves to town? I feel disgust and embarrassment. It should be an embarrassment to the gay community.”

(Peake and the other four selectmen are gay.)

Two weeks ago Peake had brought up the idea of allowing the wall space behind the select-



PHOTO MARY ANN BRAGG

The Provincetown Board of Selectmen in front of the “Study for Pilgrim Mural” painting by American painter Max Bohm (1868-1923) on Monday night.

men’s desk to be used as part of the ongoing rotation of town’s art collection. That meant that the Bohm painting would potentially be moved, at the discretion of the Art Commission.

Peake said at the time that she wanted to congratulate the Provincetown Art Association and Museum on its expansion and re-opening, which occurred the weekend before. Peake said she was proud of the many works

of art from the town collection that were shown at PAAM. She noted too that the Bohm painting behind the selectmen did not include any women.

This week Peake called her final comment, about the lack of women in the painting, as “hyperbole” that was interpreted incorrectly. She said she takes “a great deal of civic pride” in the town’s art collection, and feels the Art Commission has done a

good job in preserving and rotating the artwork. “It was never my intent to show any disrespect of the Pilgrims or the descendants of the Pilgrims,” Peake said.

According to selectmen Richard Olson, who has studied the town’s history, the Bohm painting does not reflect the signing of the Mayflower Compact, which occurred aboard the ship

ART ROTATE continued from page 3

itself, in the captain's quarters. "It's a made up scene in my mind," Olson said this week, and he recommended a visit to the Bas Relief park behind Town Hall for a more accurate depiction of the Compact signing.

Also Art Commission chair Steve Borkowski said that members of his board had not approached Peake or any selectmen about moving the Bohm painting, or using the wall space behind the selectmen's desk. Borkowski added that the painting has not hung behind the desk for 60 years, as Avellar claimed. Borkowski said that from his board's research, the painting hung for many years on two hooks on the folding doors between the Judge Welsh Room and Caucus Hall.

Borkowski added that the 1988 town report shows the selectmen in the Judge Welsh Room, with another painting, not the Bohm painting, behind them.

Even the selectmen were at odds with each other Monday night over the painting. Selectmen Olson and Michele Couture stuck with their votes from

two weeks ago to allow the painting to be moved. "So you're changing your vote from last week?" Couture asked Peake at one point.

Olson added that "it was only four or five letters" of complaint the board had received. "It's not as if we're disrespecting the Mayflower Compact, because it is not the Mayflower Compact," he said, describing the complaints as a "chorus of indignation."

Board of Selectman Chair Cheryl Andrews, on the other side, asked the board members to "stop to consider why people are riled?" "It's a very large, well-known painting that has been in the same spot for a long time, and means something to peo-

ple," Andrews said. She added that as elected representatives of the town's citizen, the board should reconsider its vote, that board members had "better things to do that upsetting people," and to stop "chuckling" about it all.

And Selectmen David Nicolau, who was on vacation for the first vote, said he had reviewed the previous meeting and found Peake's comments to be taken out of context. "Primarily it was about the art and the art being moved around," Nicolau said. He added, though, that he felt the board had "bigger fish to fry" and the painting should be left where it is.

mabragg@provincetownbanner.com