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## It's official: It's a real Van Gogh

### Wadsworth Atheneum says 'Vase with Poppies' has been authenticated

BY SUSAN DUNNE

An oil painting that has been in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum since 1957, believed to be by Vincent Van Gogh but called into question in the early 1990s, has been authenticated by researchers at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

"Vase with Poppies" has been verified as having been painted by the legendary Dutch artist in 1886, just after he moved to Paris, the museum has announced. The Atheneum now has two Van Goghs in its collection. The other is a self-portrait painted in 1887.

Thomas Loughman, director and CEO of the Wadsworth, said "Vase with Poppies" will be back in Hartford in time for the 38th annual Fine Art and Flowers event, which runs from April 26 to 28, and will be on show for the summer.

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"Vase with Poppies," an 1886 oil on canvas owned by the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art since 1957, has been definitively attributed to Vincent Van Gogh.

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

## Mueller submits Russia report

### Official: Special counsel has not recommended more indictments

BY DEVLIN BARRETT, MATT ZAPOTOSKY AND JOSH DAWSEY  
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Special counsel Robert Mueller has submitted a confidential report to Attorney General William Barr, marking the end of his investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible obstruction of justice by President Donald Trump, a Justice Department spokeswoman said.

The submission of Mueller's report ends his closely watched inquiry — a case that has engulfed the Trump administration since its inception, leading to guilty pleas from former advisers to the president and criminal charges against more than 30 people. A senior Justice Department official said the special counsel has not recommended any further indictments.

Justice Department officials notified Congress late Friday that they had received Mueller's report but did not describe its contents. Barr is expected to summarize the findings for lawmakers in coming days.

Only a small number of people inside the Justice Department know what the report says, but its contents immediately sparked a furious political reaction.

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## PUMPING UP THE HUSKIES

Teresa Stage, left, and UConn students Julia Stage, center, and Dylan DeMoura, all of Shelton, cheer on the Huskies before a first-round NCAA Tournament game against Towson on Friday night at Gampel Pavilion. UConn won 110-61. Complete coverage, **Page C1**.



BRAD HERRIGAN/HARTFORD COURANT

## Stuck in lines at tipoff time

### Frustrated NCAA fans at XL Center missed action as earlier games ran long

BY KENNETH R. GOSSELIN AND ALEX PUTTERMAN

HARTFORD — Hartford and the city's XL Center sought to show it was on top of its game for the start of Thursday's NCAA men's college basketball tournament, but the arena was hit with a foul as thousands of frustrated fans got stuck behind metal detectors and missed some of the Villanova-St. Mary's matchup.

The problem was caused by the game times — mandated by television — that ended up touching off a significant logistical mess. The 2 p.m. start time for the first two-game session — assuming matchups running a little over two hours each — would have given the arena staff about an hour before the scheduled start of the second two-game session at 7:20 p.m. In



BRAD HERRIGAN/HARTFORD COURANT

Basketball fans try to enter the XL Center at tipoff of the second session of NCAA Tournament first-round play Thursday night.

that time, the staff needs to clear 14,000 fans from the arena, clean seating areas and restrooms, restock concessions and admit 14,000 fans for the nighttime contests.

"There were just lines at every single entrance," said Marcus O'Neal, a Simsbury

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## Bills would set rules for pot industry

### State lawmakers weigh measures that would establish framework

BY DANIELA ALTIMARI

HARTFORD — State lawmakers Friday reviewed sweeping legislation that would set the ground rules for a legal marijuana industry in Connecticut and address the historic inequities of the war on drugs.

Bills to legalize marijuana for recreational use have been raised at the Capitol in the past, but this year's version of the legislation contains far more detail than earlier iterations. A companion bill that would wipe clear the criminal records of people charged with low-level drug offenses also sparked a far-reaching discussion about the inconsistency of legalizing a substance that's been outlawed for decades.

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### Families to get records

A Superior Court judge Friday deferred her order that would have denied Alex Jones the chance to argue to dismiss the lawsuit filed by the families of Sandy Hook victims after his new attorney promised to turn over nearly 40,000 emails by early next week. In an unusual hearing in Superior Court in Waterbury, Jones' recently appointed attorney Norm Pattis said his client wasn't trying to stall the proceedings or ignore the judge's orders to produce records but instead was just poorly represented.

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NEIL VIGDOR/HARTFORD COURANT

### Toll pitch

Facing a group of business leaders nervous about the economic impact of highway tolls, Gov. Ned Lamont, above left with Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton, said Friday that alternatives such as bonding for transportation projects or raising the gas tax are nonstarters. **Connecticut, Page B1**

### Taxpayer relief

The Treasury Department announced Friday that it is expanding again the relief it grants taxpayers who had too little in income taxes withheld from their paychecks in the first year of a sweeping tax overhaul. Treasury said that taxpayers will be able to avoid penalties for paying too little in taxes as long as they paid at least 80 percent of what they owed the government.

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## Painting

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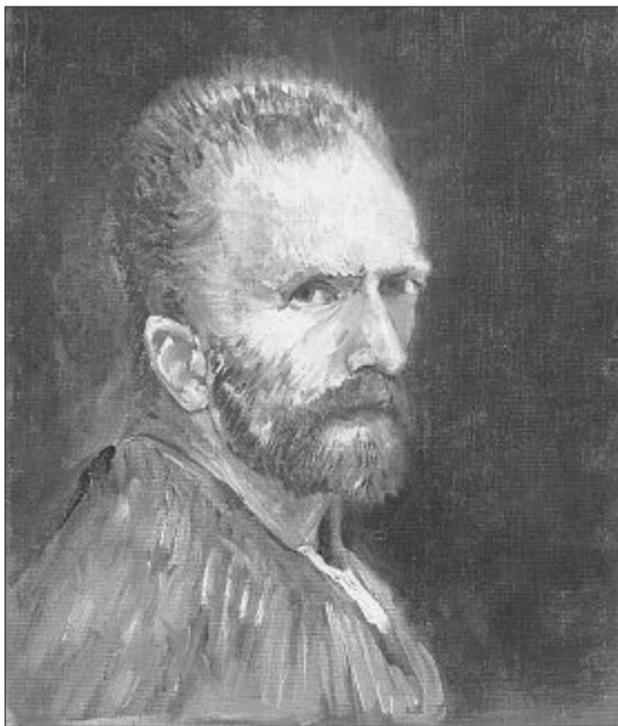
Louis van Tilborgh, senior researcher at the Van Gogh Museum, said in a press release that many unauthenticated artworks believed to be by Van Gogh — he called them “floaters” — are known to exist around the world, and one by one they are being examined.

“Slowly but surely real progress is being made in Van Gogh studies. Some of these floaters even turned out to be firmly anchored in Van Gogh’s oeuvre, and ‘Vase with Poppies,’ I am happy to say, is one of them,” van Tilborgh said.

The verification comes at the end of decades of questioning, which didn’t even start with “Vase with Poppies.” Oliver Tostmann, the museum’s curator of European art, said that in 1990 prominent art historian Walter Feilchenfeldt, a leading expert on Van Gogh, raised concerns about many purported Van Goghs around the world, including the Atheneum’s 1887 self-portrait.

“Shortly thereafter, he came to the United States and he also came here to Hartford. Apparently, he looked at the poppies and questioned its authenticity, too,” Tostmann said.

Both paintings were X-rayed. In those days, the Atheneum didn’t have its own X-ray equipment, so they were taken to



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

This 1887 self-portrait by Vincent Van Gogh was once believed to be unattributed, but now is recognized as authentic.

Hartford Hospital.

The self-portrait was found to have an underpainting, which helped to change the consensus among art experts who eventually deemed the self-portrait to be

authentic, Tostmann said.

That left the poppies. That painting was taken off exhibit and shelved.

“The poppies lingered in the storage area. It’s never been

shown since then. No one really looked into them to make a decision to find out more about their status,” Tostmann said.

In the last few years, though, Loughman said, with new technologies available, and a broader understanding of Van Gogh, the museum decided to revisit the poppies.

“New areas of knowledge were opening up to us. A lot of that is tied to the digital age,” Loughman said.

The examination of “Vase with Poppies” began at the Atheneum, using digital X-ray and advanced infrared reflectograms. That research revealed an underpainting under the poppies, too, which looked like a self-portrait. So the painting was turned over to the Amsterdam museum, which analyzed the piece’s paint, materials, linen and style and concluded it was a real Van Gogh.

The artwork is one of Van Gogh’s earliest floral paintings. Van Gogh began painting vividly colored floral works in Paris, where he had easy access to flowers. His works before that period, created in Nuenen in the Netherlands, primarily were still lifes and images of peasants in dark earth tones.

In 1886, Van Gogh wrote in a letter to artist Horace M. Livens: “I have made a series of color studies in painting, simply flowers, red poppies, blue corn flowers and myosotis, white and rose roses, yellow chrysanthemums-

seeking oppositions of blue with orange, red and green, yellow and violet.”

“Vase with Poppies” was one of a collection of French impressionist works bequeathed to the museum in 1957 upon the death of Anne Parrish Titzell, who lived in the Georgetown section of Redding.

“We didn’t know who she was. But the things she gave us! Renoir’s portrait of ‘Monet Painting in his Garden in Argenteuil!’ Holy smokes! That is a major picture,” Loughman said. “That put a little mystery on it.”

Items in that bequest also included a Monet water lily painting, a beach scene by Edgar Degas and other works.

In addition to authenticating the painting, research also revealed that “Vase with Poppies” was exhibited in the legendary 1913 Armory show in New York.

After its return to Hartford, the painting will be loaned to an exhibit in Potsdam, Germany from October to February. The theme of that show is still lifes that are believed to be by Van Gogh, and paintings recently verified as being by Van Gogh, Loughman said.

“It’s kind of a nice, poetic thing. The search goes on,” he said. “There are still pictures out there that are coming to be better understood.”

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## NCAA

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resident who has attended dozens of events at the XL Center. “No movement at all.”

Both games for the afternoon session went long, and the second game — Marquette versus Murray State — didn’t end until just after 7 p.m. The start time for the second session, beginning with Villanova and St. Mary’s, was pushed back to 7:45 p.m., but that still left just 45 minutes to clear out the arena, Chris Lawrence, general manager of the XL Center, said Friday.

“The turnaround, the timeline, no matter what building it is, quite frankly, would have challenges moving people that quickly, but you couple that with the (outdated) configuration of the building, it’s just not set up to go ahead and handle all that volume at once,” Lawrence said.

When the doors did open at 7:30 p.m., 14,000 fans were waiting in masses at four entrances to the arena, many of them growing increasingly agitated and frustrated.

Mike Peonessa, a UConn fan from Cromwell, had tickets for both sessions Thursday but was asked to leave the building after the Murray State-Marquette game ended. When he attempted to re-enter, he found himself amid a mob of ticket holders in a line that was stalled to move for at least half an hour.

“There were a lot of



ROB CARR/GETTY

Villanova’s Phil Booth drives against St. Mary’s Jordan Hunter, left, and Tanner Krebs in the second half Thursday night. Thousands of fans missed the first part of the matchup at the XL Center.

Villanova fans out there, and I felt bad because you’re paying money to see (your team), and you’ve got to wait, so that was more unfortunate for them,” he said. “For me as a UConn fan, I just wanted to get in there. I didn’t really have any affiliate, but we paid money.”

Peonessa said fans cheered when XL Center staff opened the doors but that the line remained stagnant. Eventually, he cut through the parking garage that connects to the arena’s atrium and was one of the first fans into the building, five minutes after the Villanova-Saint Mary’s game had begun.

While the arena has known for two years it

would host the tournament, the game times were not disclosed until late Sunday.

“I saw and heard that we were understaffed, it was quite the opposite,” Lawrence said. “We increased our security staff on Monday morning because we knew this was going to be a challenge, and we doubled our cleaning staff so we could clean quicker.”

The arena also opened a fourth entrance, on Ann Uccello Street opposite The Russian Lady bar, which it rarely ever does. Lawrence also disputed social media claims that there weren’t enough metal detectors. He said each entrance had the maximum allowed under

fire and building codes, including some brought over from Rentschler Field in East Hartford.

Once the doors opened, it took 40 to 50 minutes to get the crush of fans into their seats, cutting well into the first half of the Villanova-St. Mary’s game.

“I completely understand where people are coming from,” Lawrence said. “They paid a lot of money to go and be part of this experience and unfortunately, the game times are completely out of our control. All I can say is that we used every resource available to us.”

There are just two tournament games with a single admission for Saturday evening in Hartford, so the

problem isn’t expected to occur again, XL officials said.

An NCAA spokeswoman Friday confirmed that broadcast times are the call of the networks.

The sparse crowds at the start of the evening games didn’t go unnoticed by players on the court.

Villanova coach Jay Wright said his players noticed the empty seats at the beginning of their game.

“You walk out here tonight, and there’s literally no one in the building,” Wright said. “It’s bizarre. It’s really bizarre. ... We have a lot of guys in the NCAA Tournament for the first time thinking, ‘This is the NCAA Tournament? There’s no one in the stands.’”

The arena was nearly full by the end of the first half.

“How do you get 14,500 out of a building and then put probably the same amount of people back in within an hour. It’s almost impossible,” Peonessa said. “It’s unfair for the fans who were trying to see their team, and it’s unfair for even the XL Center to try to clear that many people out, clean up, restock the fridges in that short of a time.”

Jeff Conklin, a Middletown native, had a similar experience, leaving the arena after the first session only to encounter chaos at the entrances. The most frustrating thing, he said, was what he saw as lack of response and communication from XL Center management.

“I understand that the scheduling kind of screwed

everything up for the Civic Center, but they had to know what was going on,” he said. “They did nothing to fix it.”

Conklin also entered through the parking garage fairly early in the game, but he said the fans sitting next to him didn’t arrive at their seats until the second half.

By most accounts, the first day of the tournament cast the city in an overall good light as both Hartford — and the arena — were thrust into a national spotlight. Hundreds visited a pop-up beer garden on Pratt Street, and packed bars and restaurants.

Michael W. Freimuth, executive director of the Capital Region Development Authority, said Friday the vibrancy at the arena, which radiated out into the city streets, is a strong sign that a \$100 million renovation of the now 43-year-old arena would be worth the investment of state funds.

“Yesterday was ‘proof of the concept’ as they say in the R&D world,” Freimuth said. “The building can excite and serve the whole region.”

Lawrence said it was invigorating to see what the tournament had done for Hartford and the arena.

“It was a great day and it is a great week,” Lawrence said, “and hopefully, the issue that everyone is talking about today isn’t the takeaway at the end of the day.”

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## Marijuana

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“We have an opportunity now to fix something that has destroyed communities, destroyed neighborhoods, destroyed families,” said Sen. Douglas McCrory, D-Hartford. “Connecticut can do something no other state is doing, even when they attempt to legalize: an opportunity to heal communities that have been victimized by racist laws in America.”

In another hearing room at the Legislative Office Building, a different argument was put forth by opponents of legalization. Two physicians made their case that marijuana is a dangerous substance with proven health risks and its use should continue to be illegal.

Dr. Yifrah Kaminer of the UConn School of Medicine said the increased potency of marijuana and the rise in the numbers of edible products that contain THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, the chemical responsible for marijuana’s psychoactive effect, have made it even more of a health hazard. He cited studies showing a link between marijuana use and an increase in suicidal behavior, heightened risk of depression and a higher incidence of schizophrenia.

Lawmakers are considering a package of bills that would address the legal cultivation and sale of cannabis to adults over 21. The legislation comes under the purview of several legislative pan-



MARK MIRKO/HARTFORD COURANT

On a day of two legislative hearings on marijuana legalization, Dr. Deepak Cyril D’Souza of the Yale University School of Medicine, left, and Dr. Yifrah Kaminer of the UConn School of Medicine, right, testify about the public health risks of marijuana legalization during a hearing of the judiciary committee.

els: The judiciary committee is reviewing a bill that will set new penalties for driving under the influence of cannabis in addition to the proposal to erase criminal records for those previously convicted of possession of less than 1.5 ounces of marijuana.

The general law committee heard testimony on a separate measure that would create what lawmakers are calling a tightly regulated industry modeled on the state’s medical marijuana program, where everything from manufacturing processes to THC content is subject to state oversight. It would establish a panel to issue licenses and oversee the

program.

That bill also includes provisions designed to ensure minority entrepreneurs have an entry point into the multimillion-dollar marijuana industry by granting them first access to cultivation and other types of licenses, something sought by members of the legislature’s Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, who said they would not support any legalization bill that did not seek to address past inequities in drug enforcement.

Supporters of legalizing cannabis for recreational use framed the debate as a much-needed corrective of the damaging effects of decades of federal and state drug

policies.

“New Haven, like Hartford, Bridgeport and Waterbury, is a ground-zero city in this failed drug war,” said Kebra Smith-Bolden, a cannabis entrepreneur and president of CURE CT, an advocacy group supporting legal marijuana. “I know firsthand the effects the war on drugs has had on communities of color. ... Because of the failed war on drugs, which was really a war on people, restorative justice is not just the right thing to do, it is necessary to do in order to repair the damage that was done to countless communities as a result of the prohibition on cannabis.”

But critics say legalizing marijuana for recreational use wouldn’t eliminate those racial disparities and would instead inflict new harm on communities of color.

“The offsetting negativities of the normalization of marijuana outweigh the benefits,” said Todd Foster, a retired pastor from Hamden. “But when we consider the potential negative impact of doing so on the same community that you are actively fighting for, it outweighs that.”

Jason Ortiz, the political director for CURE CT, recounted his own experience with a marijuana charge. He told lawmakers he was arrested at the age of 16, after school security guards in Hartford found him carrying a small amount of pot. He was charged with possession of marijuana with the intent to sell to a minor because he was with a 15-year-old friend. Under the proposed legis-

lation, that charge would not be expunged.

“I was one of the folks that people talk about as drug dealers ... or the bad guys that need to be locked up,” Ortiz said. He asked lawmakers to amend the bill to ensure people charged with cultivation and distribution of marijuana also have the chance to clear their records.

“The point of legalization should be to admit that criminalizing folks for this plant was wrong,” Ortiz said. “If we’re going to legalize this activity for corporations ... for wealthy folks, there’s no way we can [continue] having criminal penalties for the rest of Connecticut.”

A vote on one of the marijuana-related bills is expected on Monday. Gov. Ned Lamont has endorsed the concept of legalization, although he has not weighed in on the specifics of the proposals before the General Assembly this year.

A third component of marijuana legalization — the revenue-generating aspect — remains largely unwritten. Rep. Jason Rojas, co-chair of the legislature’s finance committee, said the tax policy will come after the legalization measure has been finalized by the general law committee. Revenue estimates for legal marijuana sales have varied, with the state collecting anywhere between \$30 million and \$180 million a year, depending on the source of the estimates.

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