

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Chronology of Events Leading to Liberalization of Tariff Laws for Art

- 1916 Treasury Department defines sculpture, for Customs purposes, as "imitations of natural objects, chiefly the human form...in their true proportion of length, breadth, and thickness...."
- 1928 Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, dutiable at 40 per cent as "manufactured metal implement," ruled duty free by Customs Court. Sculpture, while still required to represent "natural form," need no longer be represented in true proportions.
- 1930 Tariff Act of 1930, art rulings not revised until present, provides basis for following restrictive customs interpretations: sculpture as natural form; collages, mosaics denied free entry because not made of traditional artists' materials; only first three casts of sculpture admitted duty free; only Gobelin tapestries duty free; no specific provision for free entry of ethnographic objects unless dated pre-1830, nor for architectural models. Difficulties did not reflect intent of Congress, but narrow interpretation at administrative level.
- 1949 American Association of Museums appoints Committee on Customs, with Dorothy H. Dudley, Museum of Modern Art Registrar, as Chairman. Proposals drafted and attempts made to obtain improved tariff rulings through Treasury Department and Congressional Committees considering then-pending Simplification of Customs bills, 1950-1953.
- 1957
Dec. 27 Revision of proposals prepared at request of Senator Jacob K. Javits (R.NY), interested in introducing legislation.
- 1958
May 27 Press conference held at Museum of Primitive Art, New York, at which Senator Javits announces plans to seek changes in tariff laws. Informal exhibition of works from Museum of Modern Art points up inconsistencies.
- May 27 Senator Javits introduces Bill S.3900 in Senate; identical bill H.R. 12706 simultaneously introduced in House by Rep. Frank Thompson, Jr. (D.NJ)
- 1959
Jan. Bill reintroduced in House as H.R. 2505 by Rep. Thompson.
- Feb. 5 Bill reintroduced in Senate as S. 948 by Senators Javits and Douglas (D.Ill.)
- Mar. 15 National Committee to Liberalize the Tariff Laws for Art organized, with R. Sturgis Ingersoll, the President of Philadelphia Museum of Art, as Chairman; Mrs. E. Powis Jones and Mrs. Louise R. Smith of the Museum of Modern Art, as co-chairmen of the Executive Committee; sponsored by 28 museums and art organizations nationally. 70,000 leaflets distributed urging citizens to write their congressmen in support of tariff bill.
- Apr. 8 Amendments representing almost identical version of previous tariff bills proposed by Senator Javits to HR 2411 (a bill providing for free importation of tourist literature).
- July 16 Miss Dudley testifies before Senate Finance Committee on behalf of proposed legislation.
- Aug. 25 H.R. 2411 passed by Senate.
- Sept. 3 H.R. 2411 passed by House.
- Sept. 14 Bill signed by President Eisenhower.
- Oct. 13 Bill takes effect as Public Law 86-262.

For the first time free entry is permitted to collages; original mosaics; abstract sculpture; ten (instead of three) casts of sculpture; recent lithographs; architectural models; all tapestries made exclusively for use as wall hangings and valued at not less than \$20 per square foot; and ethnographic objects in traditional aboriginal styles produced fifty years prior to their date of entry.