

Alfred Bader

Art Related Correspondence

Prado

1986

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY ATQUINNES	
LOCATOR	5169
BOX	3
FILE	8

INTRODUCTION

Most of the great collections of master drawings of the past can be reconstructed after centuries because, more often than not, one finds the collector's mark on the objects themselves. Paintings usually do not bear such marks, but catalogues have increasingly made up for that lack; they preserve the vivid memory of the collection and its owner for posterity - all too often, to be sure, when that collection is near the point of being dissolved.

Happily, this catalogue is not concerned with the past but with a very lively present, and it contains only a judicious choice from a larger collection. Changes may eventually occur in the latter but are not very likely in the former, which reflects the owner's predilections most clearly.

Introducing a private collection of paintings is to introduce the person of its owner - if, and it is an important if, that collection bears his personal mark. There exist many private collections in our time to which this does not apply; they are more likely a gauge of the owner's wealth, of his speculative instincts or of his acceptance of sundry advice than of his personal artistic taste, and more of his impatience than of his patience. Alfred Bader is a research man in two fields. This is not the place to speak of his main profession, which is a book with seven seals to most people who have the dubious privilege of living exclusively in the world of art and its history; but as he enters theirs he yields to none when it comes to patience and the uncompromising pursuit of the right solution of problems which intrigue them in the areas of attribution, subject matter, preservation and originality.

It stands to reason that quality is the main goal. The history of this collection is a history of refinement, although some of the owner's earliest acquisitions have stood the test of time very well indeed. He is a passionate "hunter", and some of his trophies are of the kind that would justly make any museum director proud. His predilection goes to Netherlandish masters of the seventeenth century, more often Dutch than Flemish, and specifically to representations from the Old Testament, but with due regard, and often with true love for an occasional rarity from other areas of Bible and history, for desirable portraits, genre scenes, landscapes and still lifes. After securing a work which appeals to him for any one of these reasons, regardless of "name", he does not rest until he has also secured full knowledge of its subject and its correct attribution, and that is as it should be. For if the subject of the picture was of interest to an excellent painter, it ought to be of interest to the person who is fortunate enough to own his work; if the painter has given a significant and enduringly appealing interpretation and form to that subject, he is worthy of being known by name; if this enterprise is full of puzzling aspects in either or preferably both ways, what could be more challenging? Lots of art historians could learn a great many things from Alfred Bader; and *all* art lovers are indebted to his zeal, his perspicacity and his often proven generosity in sharing his treasures with them.

Wolfgang Stechow



INTRODUCTION

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Wolfgang Stechow





MUSEO DEL PRADO

El Director

13.6.86

Prof. C. Seoane
Universidad Complutense
Facultad de Ciencias Químicas
Departamento de Química Orgánica
Ciudad Universitaria
MADRID

Estimado Sr. y amigo:

Considero una obligación, aunque no me resulta grato, el transmitirle el comentario de cuantas personas, profesionales responsables de la restauración e investigación químico-física aplicada a la pintura, me han hecho llegar respecto a la conferencia del Dr. Bader, en el que tanta insistencia mostró.

Al parecer, y siempre, por supuesto, a partir de las informaciones que me llegan, la conferencia tuvo un tono absolutamente inadecuado al rigor exigible en un centro como el Museo del Prado y ante un público en el que se hallaban profesionales rigurosos.

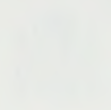
La impresión que todos obtuvieron de ella es la de que, en lo que a la restauración se refiere, el Dr. Bader no es más que un aficionado que emplea técnicas y procedimientos absolutamente inadecuados y que al menos, a través de cuanto hizo saber en su intervención, desconoce las investigaciones más recientes.

Por otra parte, sus afirmaciones sobre la clasificación histórico artística de algunas obras no resisten una crítica rigurosa y le muestran, una vez más, como un amateur demasiado en contacto con el mundo del comercio.

Considero una obligación dejarle constancia de todo ello, pues se que está siendo comentada esta actuación en detrimento del Museo del Prado y de su rigor.

Atentamente,

Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez



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Prof. Dr. C. Seoane
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS QUIMICAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE QUIMICA ORGANICA

CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA
28040 - MADRID

Prof. Dr. Alfonso Pérez Sánchez
Museo del Prado
Paseo del Prado s/n
28014-Madrid

29.6.86

Estimado Profesor Pérez Sánchez:

Recibo su carta de 13 de Junio, que leo con profunda inquietud.

Lamento muy sinceramente que el resultado de nuestro ofrecimiento desinteresado haya merecido tan despectiva valoración en los informes que le han hecho llegar. Es ciertamente una lástima que no haya sido posible su asistencia al acto y que las obligaciones del Dr. Luna le obligaran a abandonarnos tras los primeros minutos.

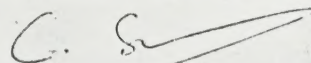
Tal vez el Dr. Bader entendió que no se trataba de una sesión de investigación, sino de una conferencia menos técnica y mas amena. Puede ser ello consecuencia de una errónea interpretación del texto de la carta en la que, como respuesta a la documentación sobre el conferenciante, se seleccionaba el tema de la intervención como "de interés para el público que sigue nuestros ciclos". Es probable que una reposada discusión previa hubiese resultado esclarecedora en este sentido.

Se advirtió, si, un notable pudor en el empleo de ideas químicas, como pudimos constatar los químicos presentes, que constituíamos posiblemente la mayoría del escaso público que asistió al acto. La restricción de tecnicismos despertó, al menos en buena parte del público asistente, reacciones bien distintas de las manifestadas en sus informes.

En cuanto a los aspectos histórico-artísticos, tan fuera de mi alcance, considero un deber transmitir sus comentarios críticos al Dr. Bader, en beneficio de todos.

Sea cual sea la lectura que deba darse a los acontecimientos, creame que lamento profundamente la situación.

Un cordial saludo



Carlos Seoane

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you regarding the matter of the...

The information provided to me indicates that...

I am sure that you will find this information...

Yours faithfully,

Carlos Seoane Prado

DOCTOR EN CIENCIAS QUIMICAS
PROFESOR TITULAR DE LA
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE

Avda. de El Ferrol, 2-9.º 1

Teléfono 738 10 91

28020 Madrid

...../.....

Concerning your request for a list of the Spanish Chemical Society members, I have got the list for you. I am sending it under separate mail.

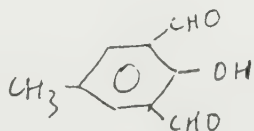
I have been reading the collective volume and the recent issues of Aldrichimica Acta and I really enjoyed some of the articles, both on chemistry, chemists and art. Please, be sure to have my name on your mailing list.

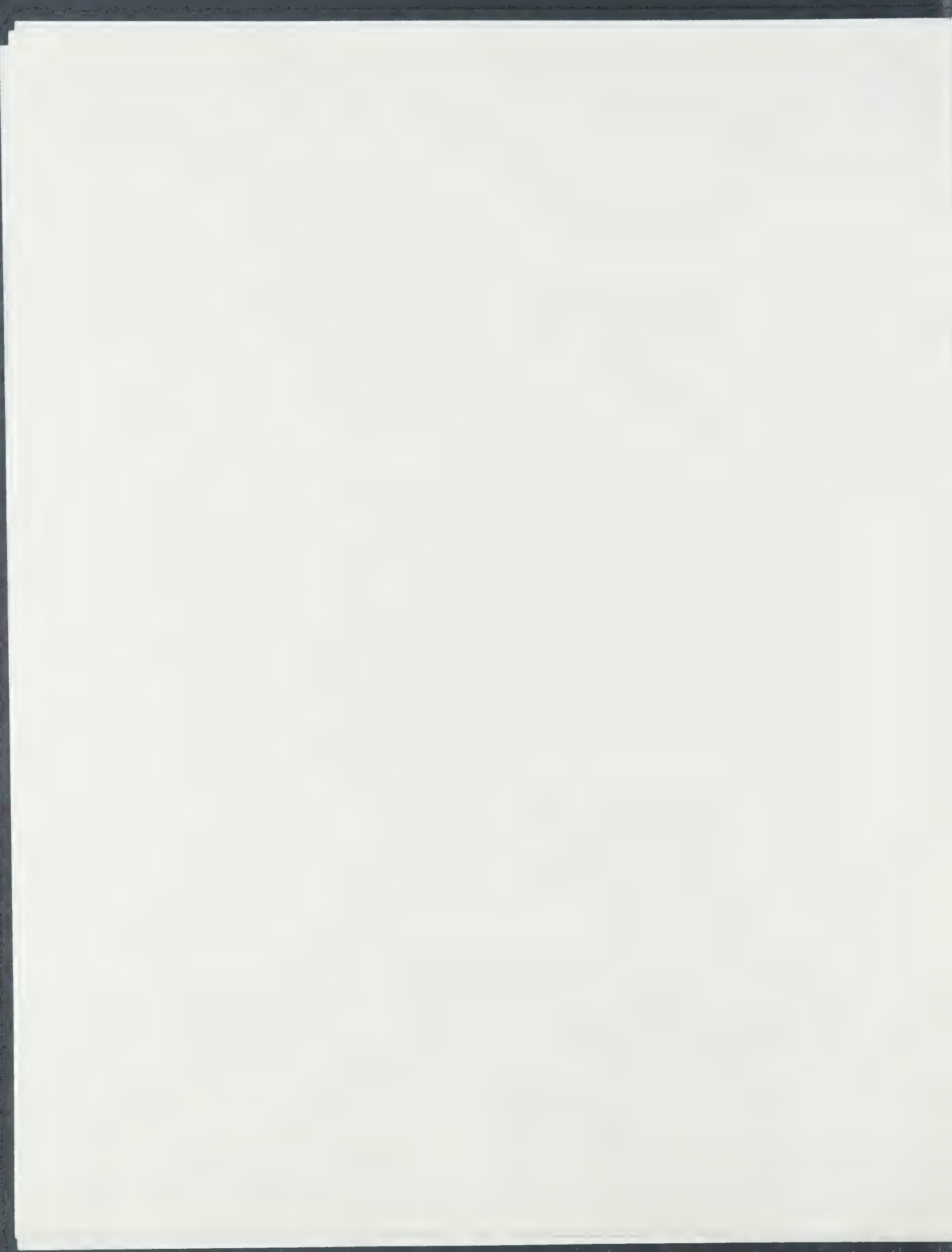
Finally, I received a very embarrassing, unpleasant letter from Professor Pérez-Sánchez (enclosed). A foreign friend once told me: "Carlos, you spend half your life being helpful and the other half apologizing on behalf of other spaniards for not being helpful". Of course it is not true and I took it as a compliment, but this time I must indulge in such a behaviour informing you about the letter. I certainly did not expect such a letter. I replied with a somewhat ironic writing to the main issue. However, an imprecise point raised in Pérez-Sánchez's letter involves art history and I am unable to comment intelligently. If you decide to reply, please feel free to tell Prof. Pérez-Sánchez I sent you a copy of his letter. His full address is;

Prof Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez
Director del Museo
Museo del Prado
Paseo del Prado s/n
28014-Madrid
Spain

Anyway, please, tell me about the affair.

Now back to Chemistry. There are a couple of building blocks that can be of interest to you. The first one is:





UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE



FACULTÉ DES LETTRES

Département
d'histoire de l'art et de musicologie

Genève, le 12 July 1986
22, boulevard des Philosophes · CH-1205 Genève

Dear Dr. Bader:

you may by now have returned to Milwaukee from your extended journey in Europe.

On behalf of my department, I would once again wish to express you all our gratitude for having come to Geneva and having given us a fine and most stimulating lecture on your collection. I know from quite a few people in the audience that managed to fascinate everybody with a presentation full of interest, of poignant details, and of a combination of science and art as only you are qualified to offer it.

It was a great honor to have you and Mrs Bader at our house, I only regret that there was not much time, but from your schedule I know that you will be back.

So once again to accept our warmest thanks, we were all delighted to meet you here. I do hope you will come again on your next trip, and if meanwhile there is something I can do for you here, do not hesitate to call on me.

With our best regards to you and to Mrs. Bader believe me

Sincerely,
Maxim Roethlisberger



Chemists Helping Chemists in Research and Industry

aldrich chemical company, inc.

Dr. Alfred Bader
Chairman

September 2, 1986

Prof. Dr. Alfonso E. Perez Sanchez
El Director
Museo Del Prado
Madrid, Spain

Dear Prof. Dr. Perez Sanchez:

Isabel and I were staggered to receive copies of your letter to Prof. Carlos Seoane of June 13, and of his reply; to remind you I enclose copies.

What a pity that you did not have a chance to hear my talk. If you had, I hope you would have realized that what your informants told you is utter nonsense. I was speaking as a collector, not a restorer, and I was careful to stress that none of the restoration described was done by myself but by skilled restorers.

Clearly there are different points of view as to the preservation and restoration of paintings. Some people, of course, would prefer to do nothing, leaving the dirt to obscure a great painting in some misplaced reverence for the master even though his work can now scarcely be seen.

Others believe in cleaning carefully and stabilizing what remains, while others, as I do, believe that when a work is very carefully restored in a manner which does not alter the original and which could at any time be easily removed, it makes it possible for people today to come closer to the great beauty of the original master.

I can now understand just a little why you have had such difficulties over the fine restoration of one of your greatest works, Las Meninas. And why so many of your paintings are in such poor condition. Next time you are in your Dutch room, look at the Jakob van Ruisdael landscapes--probably great works, shockingly dirty. Few other great museums would exhibit works in that condition.

Luckily your iconographers are much more competent than your restorers. I had the pleasure of looking at your fine (though very dirty) early Rembrandt (Bredius 468) which is generally called "Sophonisba Receiving the Poison" but which you correctly call "Artemisia." Under all the dirty varnish you can just discern the servant bringing the ashes--this does not show up in reproductions, hence the confusion.

Prof. Dr. Alfonso E. Perez Sanchez
Museo Del Prado
September 2, 1986
Page Two



To revert to your informers' hurtful comments: I gave the same talk at the Department of Art History of the University of Geneva, and I enclose copy of Professor Marcel Roethlisberger's thank you note. I don't think he wrote this just to be nice. I also enclose a copy of a note Professor Wolfgang Stechow (the greatest art historian I have known) wrote about my collecting.

I believe that one of the functions of a museum is to encourage and educate collectors, as well as the general public. Many museums have benefited from the gifts made by collectors who have been grateful for the inspiration and help they have received from museums. I do not see why a talk from a collector, such as myself, which the majority of the listeners really enjoyed and which made them understand more about paintings should cause anyone to feel that the reputation of the Prado had suffered a blow.

At the Prado I did not even receive a thank you after the talk, and your letter adds insult to injury. Luckily I met hundreds of Spaniards--art historians and chemists--during our two weeks' trip through Spain, and so I know that your informants are not representative of Spaniards.

Isabel worked immensely hard to translate my talk into Spanish, and I am convinced that most of the listeners thoroughly enjoyed it. Why would you--a great and well-known art historian stoop to write so hurtfully? I trust that your letter to Prof. Seoane was in no way confidential, and that you will not object to my sharing it and my reply with other art historians--as a sad commentary on conditions at the Prado.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alfred Bader".

Alfred Bader

AB:mmh

Enclosures

cc: Prof. Dr. Carlos Seoane



MUSEO DEL PRADO

El Director

1.10.86

Mr. Alfred Bader
P.O. Box 355, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin 53201
USA

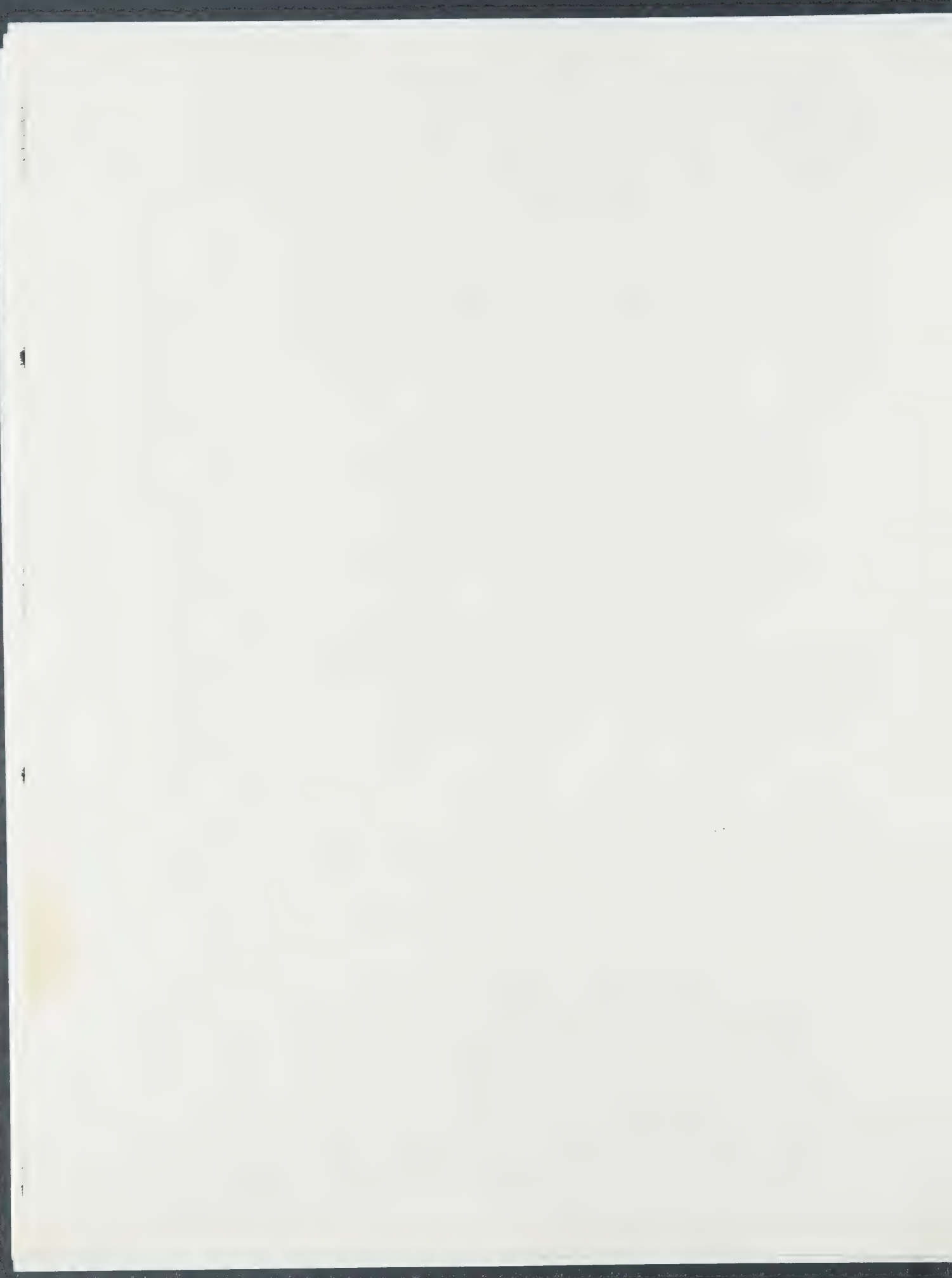
Dear Sir,

I regret deeply the sorrow you felt with the evident indiscretion of Professor Seoane as he sent you a private and confidential le
tter.

In any case as I was not present at the lecture any kind of infor
mation must be considered only as a partial one.

Yours sincerely,

Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez



Prof. Dr. C. Seoane
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS QUIMICAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE QUIMICA ORGANICA

CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA
28040 - MADRID

31-10-1986

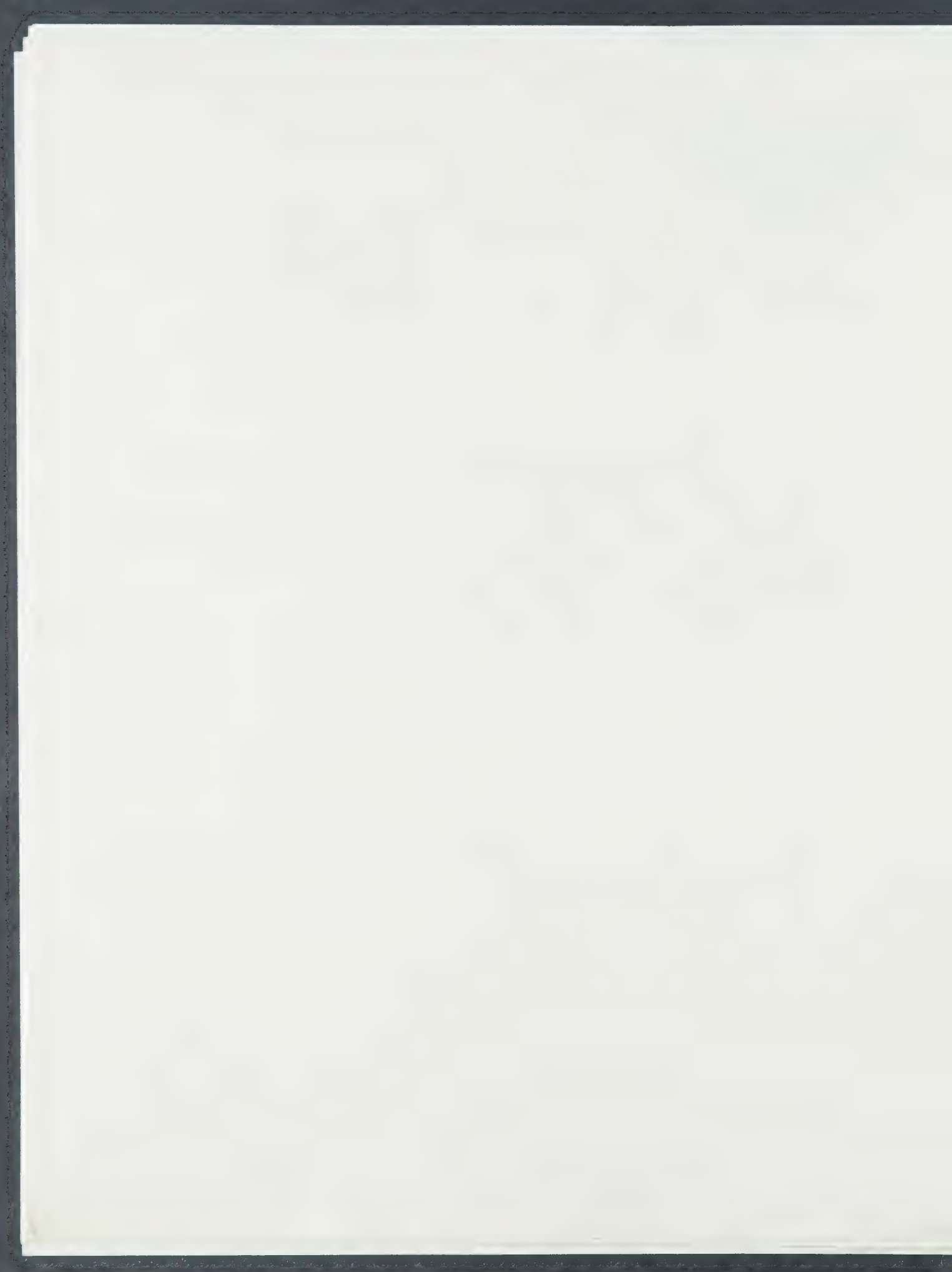
Prof. Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez
Director del Museo del Prado
Paseo del Prado s/n
Madrid

Estimado Prof. Pérez Sánchez:

Me veo, con sorpresa, calificado de responsable del comprensible malestar del Dr. Bader.

Ofrecer a quien es víctima de graves acusaciones, dudosamente fundamentadas, la posibilidad de defenderse parece mas un acto de justicia que una evidente indiscreción.

Reciba, como siempre, un cordial saludo,
Atentamente



MUSEO DEL PRADO

El Director

26.11.86

RECEIVED
DEC 08 1987
Ans'd.....

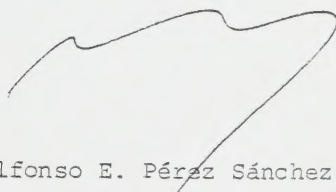
Prof. Dr. Carlos Seoane
Universidad Complutense
Facultad de Ciencias Químicas
Departamento de Química Orgánica
Ciudad Universitaria
28040 MADRID

Estimado Dr. Seoane:

Acuso recibo del nuevo título honorífico que le ha sido concedido al Dr. Bader. Le agradezco la información facilitada y tomo nota de cuanto en el título consta.

Le ruego que de por cancelado el desdichado incidente y transmita al Dr. Bader mi felicitación más sincera.

Atentamente,



Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez

I acknowledge receipt of the new honorary title conferred on Dr. Bader. I thank you for the information and I take note of what the title means. I request that the unfortunate incident be forgotten and give my sincere wishes to Dr. Bader.

RECEIVED
DEC 19 1987
AM 11:00

Prof. Dr. Carlos Secane
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS QUIMICAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE QUIMICA ORGANICA

CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA
28040 - MADRID

19.11.36

Prof. Dr. D. Alfonso Pérez Sánchez
Director del Museo del Prado
Madrid

Estimado Profesor Pérez Sánchez:

El Dr. Alfred Bader ha recibido el Doctorado Honoris Causa por la Queen's University de Canadá y me hace llegar una copia del documento de concesión.

Con el propósito de que podamos ir acercándonos a una valoración mas aquilatada de pasados acontecimientos, tengo mucho gusto en enviárselo con esta carta.

Reciba, como siempre, un cordial saludo.

Atentamente



Fond regards



100-400000

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