

NEW WAPO BOSS, WILL LEWIS, BRAGS ABOUT DICK PIC SNIFFING THAT FAILS TO CORRECT PAST ERRORS

In a predictably solicitous interview between Ben Smith and the new publisher of WaPo, Will Lewis, Smith asked Lewis how the WaPo has escaped “becoming the kind of partisan brand that others have.”

Do you think the Post has escaped becoming the kind of partisan brand that others have?

For those that read our brilliant opinion section, if you read our news, if you read our Hunter Biden art sales story yesterday; if you read our balanced and incredibly interesting coverage about Trump-Haley; if you do that, then you will know that we are the most objective news organization in America and we have the most balanced, diverse opinion section where we have opinions from all sorts of people. It's like an oasis of calm and considered thought.

The very first story that Lewis boasted about was this Matt Viser story, largely simple regurgitation of the publicly-released transcripts of the Georges Bergès and Kevin Morris transcripts.

Viser describes the cost to Bergès' business of the scandal (while Viser mentions Bergès' comments about politics, he doesn't mention that the guy likely being threatened by Trump supporters described financially and electorally supporting Trump).

Bergès said that while he and Biden have become friendly, he let the contract lapse last year. “From a business perspective, it hasn’t been the best decision for me,” Bergès said, citing security issues, death threats and assumptions about his political affiliations.

“It was a little bit more than I could chew, that obviously I kind of wanted my life back,” he said.

He also describes that an earlier story of his, which largely created this scandal, came up repeatedly.

Bergès was asked numerous times during his interview about White House involvement in his arrangement with the Georges Bergès Gallery as first described by The Washington Post in July 2021. The Post reported that White House attorneys, concerned about potential ethical issues, urged that any buyers of Hunter’s paintings be kept confidential, a practice that was adopted.

Bergès testified that he never spoke with anyone from the White House, and claimed that he was surprised to read reports about the arrangement. At the time, he did not respond to phone and email messages from The Post, but a person who said she was calling on behalf of Bergès confirmed to The Post that all sales would be kept secret from Hunter Biden.

What Dick Pic Sniffing Matt Viser doesn’t reveal, however, is that Bergès debunked a key premise of Viser’s earlier story: that he was selling Hunter’s art for up to \$500,000 a painting. That claim appeared in the lede and – directly attributed to Bergès – several paragraphs into the story. That price tag is the

basis of Richard Painter's concerns about the deal and art critic Marc Straus' complaints about the prices.

White House officials have helped craft an agreement under which purchases of Hunter Biden's artwork – which could be listed at prices as high as \$500,000 – will be kept confidential from even the artist himself, in an attempt to avoid ethical issues that could arise as a presidential family member tries to sell a product with a highly subjective value.

[snip]

But the arrangement is drawing detractors, including ethics experts as well as art critics who suggest that Hunter Biden's art would never be priced so high if he had a different last name. Bergès has said that prices for the paintings would range from \$75,000 to \$500,000.

"The whole thing is a really bad idea," said Richard Painter, who was chief ethics lawyer to President George W. Bush from 2005 to 2007. "The initial reaction a lot of people are going to have is that he's capitalizing on being the son of a president and wants people to give him a lot of money. **I mean, those are awfully high prices.**"

[snip]

Although some art critics have praised Hunter Biden's art, **several contacted by The Post found the asking prices of \$75,000 to \$500,000 hard to justify.**

Marc Straus, who for the past decade has owned a gallery on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, said that among high-end art dealers, "nobody would ever start at these prices" for someone who has no professional training and has never sold

art on the commercial market.

"There has to be a résumé that reasonably supports when you get that high," Straus said. "To me, it's pure 'how good is it and what's this artist's potential, what's the résumé?' On that basis, it would be an entirely different price. But you give it a name like Hunter Biden, maybe they'll get the price."

[my emphasis]

What Viser didn't bother to tell readers, though, is that claim – that Bergès was selling these paintings for up to \$500,000 – was debunked in the transcript.

Mr. Bishop. The Washington Post article that's marked as exhibit number 3, have you read that before?

Mr. Bergès. Which one's that?

Mr. Bishop. Do you have the article?

Ms. Forrest. H, I think.

Mr. Bergès. H? I've never read that before.

Mr. Bishop. It says in the one, two, three, four, fifth paragraph, the concluding 10 line says, "Bergès has said that prices for the paintings would range from \$75,000 to \$500,000." **Is that false?**

Mr. Bergès. **Yes.**

Mr. Bishop. Did you ever say that?

Mr. Bergès. I don't recall ever saying that.

Mr. Bishop. Okay.

Mr. Bergès. I know that there was an article from the Artnet that came out and said that and I don't know if it was

my publicist who had said that or I don't know where that number came from. But I do remember having conversations with my publicist and asking how in the heck did they come out with that number because I didn't have anything for \$400,000, \$500,000, or \$300,000. The price range was pretty realistic. I mean, it's not – if you looked at a New York Post article that I can recall where they had an art critic say this prices should be around 40 to \$85,000 from his professional opinion and it was the Post.

So but there was nothing above 3, 4, 500. So that was inaccurate. [my emphasis]

It was debunked not just in Bergès' denial. But it was debunked in the prices for the artwork described in the testimony. The prices at which Bergès had sold Hunter's paintings **by the time of that story** were \$13,000 and \$75,000; Kevin Morris testified to spending \$40,000 on two paintings before that.

Sure, Viser didn't totally invent this false claim, as he has some false claims in the past. But he also admits, both in the original and this updated story, that he never spoke to Bergès personally.

His error, however unintentional, mainstreamed the claim that Hunter Biden was getting rich off inflated prices for artwork. It *manufactured* the idea that people were going to launder money to the Biden family through Bergès.

And Viser didn't even mention that Bergès refuted that claim. Viser didn't mention that a key premise of this entire scandal, a premise largely mainstreamed thanks to his own story, was wrong.

This wrong premise did direct harm to Bergès' business and his life (to say nothing of Hunter Biden's). And WaPo doesn't even have the good

grace to admit that it was an error.

This was a manufactured ethical scandal, and WaPo won't even admit to the erroneous premise behind the scandal that they created.