



Association of Art Museum Directors

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SURVEY SHOWS MUSEUM ANTIQUITIES PURCHASES ARE LESS THAN 10% OF GLOBAL TRADE

NEW YORK, February 7, 2006 – American art museum purchases of antiquities and archaeological material represent less than 10% of the global annual trade in antiquities, according to a survey of its members by the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). The survey was conducted by AAMD to gauge standards and practices in the stewardship of antiquities collections over the last five years by the association’s 169 members in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The results of the survey were reported to the membership at AAMD’s midwinter meeting this past week.

According to the survey, the members of AAMD spent, in aggregate, an average of \$7 million per year on antiquities acquisitions over the last five years. This total is less than 10% of the global annual trade in antiquities, which is conservatively estimated at \$100 million annually – and may be as high as \$4 billion per year.*

“The results of this survey clearly show that the forces driving the antiquities trade lie outside of the American art museum community,” commented Mary Sue Sweeney Price, president of AAMD and director of the Newark Museum. “It is in the public’s interest that museums collect great works of art for research, scholarship, and the education and enjoyment of the public we serve. We remain committed to upholding standards and practices for acquisitions that, in a complex and rapidly changing environment, foster prudence and responsibility in the global trade for antiquities.”

The AAMD survey, to which all 169 of the association’s current members responded, also shows:

- Of the association’s 169 members, 53 actively collect antiquities;
- Of those 53 members, 87% have a collections policy specifically addressing the responsible acquisition of antiquities;
- 66% of these members’ policies draw on the guidelines AAMD approved in 2004 for the acquisition of antiquities and archaeological material; an additional 17% are in the process of revising their policies to incorporate AAMD’s guidelines;
- Over the last five years, 98% of the antiquities purchased by member museums have complete, post-1970 provenance (the year of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import and Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property);

* In *Who Owns The Past? Cultural Policy, Cultural Property, and the Law*, edited by Kate Fitz Gibbon and published by Rutgers University Press in 2005, the global trade in antiquities is estimated to be \$100 - \$200 million per year. Others, such as the archaeological organization SAFE: Saving Antiquities For Everyone, estimate that the antiquities trade is \$4 billion annually.

- Of all acquisitions of antiquities – gifts and purchases combined – 86% have complete, post-1970 provenance information; and
- Over the last five years, 8 museums report having settled an ownership claim concerning one or more objects in their antiquities collections.

While, in general, museums do not release data on individual museum acquisition spending, AAMD’s members agreed that the aggregate survey results were important in order to build a clearer understanding of the role of American art museums in the global antiquities trade.

“The question of unprovenanced antiquities has rightly been the subject of heated debate in recent months,” Ms. Price observed. “While gaps in provenance information do not necessarily mean an object has been looted or stolen, museums must continue to do everything in our power to prevent illicitly obtained objects from entering our collections. It is important to stress that the acquisition of unprovenanced material is the exception, not the rule, in museum acquisitions of antiquities and archaeological material.”

At its midwinter meeting last week, AAMD also adopted new guidelines to assist member museums – and to advise others, such as private collectors and dealers – in the loan of antiquities and archaeological materials to museums for temporary exhibitions and long-term public display. These guidelines, which will be released to the public shortly, build upon the principles and processes outlined in AAMD’s 2004 Report of the Task Force on the Acquisition of Antiquities and Ancient Art.

In addition, AAMD’s members reaffirmed their commitment to three core principles with respect to antiquities and archaeological materials:

1. AAMD deplors the looting and illicit trade of works of art and archaeological materials;
2. AAMD’s members are committed to the highest ethical standards in the development and stewardship of the art collections they hold in public trust; and
3. AAMD’s members are committed to protecting, interpreting, and exhibiting our shared cultural heritage.

The Association of Art Museum Directors is a membership organization representing 169 directors of major art museums in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Its purpose is to aid its members in establishing and maintaining the highest standards for themselves and their institutions. AAMD serves as a forum for the exchange of information and the exploration of ideas, and a voice to express the joint concerns and issues facing the museum community.

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