



## Association of Art Museum Directors

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Since I started working at AAMD last spring, I have been struck anew by the incredible research that takes place at museums, and the impact that this can have on a museum's ability to engage audiences. Sometimes this research leads to high-visibility discoveries, such as the Velázquez "[hiding in plain sight](#)" (as the *New York Times* put it) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Other times, they become the subject of high-profile debate, as in the discussion taking place about a group of sculptures [attributed to Degas](#) and now on view at the Herakleidon Museum in Athens.

At the same time, there are many other stories about museum research out there that may not capture public attention in the same way, but are just as important to our collective understanding of art and history, and that benefit the public as well as the museums themselves. For example, last month the San Diego Museum of Art reported they had come across a work during an inventory review that turned out to be a [rare pastel portrait by Rosalba Carreira](#). Concerned that the work may have been stolen during WWII, the curator of European art searched through numerous auction catalogues and museum records to establish that the work had, in fact, been sold two decades earlier and was a legitimate part of the SDMA's collection. It now hangs in the galleries for the public to enjoy. In another case, earlier this year a church outside Minneapolis discovered a painting in storage and contacted the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Having languished out of sight in a rural Minnesota church for over 70 years, an MIA curator determined it to be [an important work by the French painter Ary Scheffer](#). The church recently gave the painting to the museum and conservators are now restoring it before installing it in the galleries. These stories reflect a combination of different attributes of museum scholarship, from connoisseurship to the provenance research museums do to determine how and when a work was acquired, and who owned it previously.

In these and many other instances, there is a beneficial cycle at work: museums reassess and conserve works in their collection; new discoveries come to light; an announcement is made; works are exhibited with new perspective; news is generated; audiences come; more news is generated, and so on. Certainly, among other things, a major benefit of this cycle is that it helps the general public understand the importance of art museum collections—and how the ongoing behind-the-scenes work at a museum ultimately benefits them as viewers.

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Executive Director