



## Association of Art Museum Directors

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### **ART MUSEUMS, PRIVATE COLLECTORS, AND THE PUBLIC BENEFIT**

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More than 90% of the art collections held in public trust by America's art museums were donated by private individuals. From the legendary patrons of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today's supporters of cutting-edge contemporary art, private collectors and philanthropists, in partnership with museum professionals, have made possible the unprecedented growth of art museums as cultural, educational and civic centers throughout the nation. To ensure the continued growth, diversification and relevance of these incomparable resources, the development and cultivation of strategic relationships with private collectors is a high priority for museum directors.

The donation of collections and individual works of art to public institutions is one aspect of a distinctly American tradition of philanthropy. This same civic-minded impulse has also built our nation's universities, libraries, hospitals, community centers and parks. Gifts and loans of art constitute but one of the many benefits that individuals provide to the development of museums and the fulfillment of their public service mission.

Many collectors donate additional resources to support scholarship, publications, educational programming, capital projects and administrative expenses. As business and civic leaders, many bring professional expertise to their role as trustees or advisors to museum boards and committees. As individuals who are not only passionate but knowledgeable about a specific field, they often provide perspective and insight that can assist directors and curators in the display and interpretation of works of art. With contemporary art, collectors can take greater risks than institutions in acquiring new art and making it accessible to the public through gift and loans to museums.

In the 150 years since the founding of America's first art museum, institutions and collectors have built an extraordinary record of collaboration for the public good. But the relationships between museums and individuals – like all

relationships – have inherent challenges as well. To ensure public benefit from loans and donations to museums by private collectors of works from their collections, museum directors – in consultation with trustees and staff – weigh the following questions:

- Is the work, in terms of content and quality, consistent with the mission of the museum and the context provided by its permanent collections and programs?
- Does the work enhance the educational opportunities provided by the museum to the public?
- Does the work reflect the interests of museum constituencies?
- Does the work enhance the museum's leadership position as a cultural and educational resource to the community?
- Does the work bring new art, new knowledge and/or new cultural perspectives that enhance the community's quality of life?
- Is the collector an individual with a reputation of integrity whose involvement enhances the museum's program?
- Are the collector's motives transparent and acceptable to the museum?
- Are there restrictive conditions on the loan or gift that place an undue burden on the museum?
- Are the provenance and ownership of the work known and acceptable to the museum?
- Are there legal or ethical issues associated with the gift or loan that can be anticipated by the museum?
- Are there security and/or conservation considerations related to the loan or gift?
- Does financial support provided by collectors primarily enhance the museum's fulfillment of its public and scholarly mission?
- Does the collector have an established history of philanthropy and sustained commitment to the museum?
- Does the work appear to have the potential to deliver a substantial public benefit that justifies the time and resources invested in its cultivation and development?

- When the collector has special knowledge of his/her work and can provide meaningful technical or interpretive support to the museum in exhibiting, publishing or otherwise making the work publicly accessible, is the museum making appropriate use of this knowledge?

Each of the 175 institutions represented by the membership of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) answers these questions according to the unique mandate of its mission and the interests of its community. All museums operate with a system of checks and balances by which museum directors, trustees and staff evaluate and decide upon the terms of their engagement with private collectors. Underlying these operational processes is a set of core values to which the members of AAMD subscribe and which guide all aspects of their work as museum professionals. These core values are:

*Mission:* The mission of all art museums is to serve the public through art and education. Fulfillment of this mission is the primary goal of every AAMD member and the touchstone by which all decisions are made concerning museum programs and operations.

*Individuality:* Each museum has a unique identity, and its collections and programs serve the distinctive interests of its community. Museum directors have the responsibility and the freedom to exercise sound professional judgment in ensuring that their museums are responsive to local interests while adhering to the national standards of quality for which the AAMD's members are recognized.

*Accountability:* Museum directors are responsible to their trustees, staff, donors and community for ensuring that museums fulfill their public service mission and reinforce the leadership position of museums as cultural and educational resources.

*Integrity:* Museum directors are responsible to their trustees, staff, donors and community for ensuring that museums meet the highest standards of curatorial, professional and ethical integrity.

*Transparency:* Museum directors manage their institutions – and, to the extent possible, the involvement in their museums by outside individuals and organizations – to promote clarity of purpose in action and openness in internal and external communications.

The AAMD promulgates fundamental standards by which art museums should be governed and managed. These principles are found in the publication, *Professional Practices in Art Museums*, which has been revised at ten year intervals since 1971. The AAMD's commitment to these core values and the success of its members in managing their institutions' relationships with private collectors and philanthropists have ensured that America's art museums are among the most trusted and respected public institutions in the world – resources

for education and enjoyment that provide lasting benefits to the people of the world.

The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) is a membership organization which represents 175 directors of the major art museums in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The President for 2001-2002 is James Cuno, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. AAMD's Executive Director is Millicent Hall Gaudieri.