

**Statement of the Association of Art Museum Directors (“AAMD”)  
Presented by Stephen J. Knerly, Jr.\***

**Meeting of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee to Review Proposal to Extend  
the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of  
American and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia Concerning the  
Imposition of Import Restrictions on Khmer Archaeological Material,  
February 27, 2013.**

**I. Introduction**

This statement is made on behalf of the Association of Art Museum Directors (“AAMD”). The AAMD is a professional organization consisting of directors of art museums in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The purpose of the AAMD is to support its members in increasing the contribution of art museums to society. The AAMD accomplishes this mission by establishing and maintaining the highest standards of professional practice, serving as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas, acting as an advocate for its member art museums, and being a leader in shaping public discourse about the arts community and the role of art in society.

The AAMD deplores the illicit and unscientific excavation of archeological materials and ancient art from archeological sites and the destruction or defacing of ancient monuments. The AAMD is also committed to the responsible acquisition of archeological materials and ancient art and believes that the artistic achievements of all civilizations should be represented in art museums, that, uniquely, offer the public the opportunity to encounter works of art directly, in the context of their own and other cultures, and where these works may educate, inspire and be enjoyed by all. The AAMD recognizes and applauds the United States when it has taken a balanced approach to the protection of the world’s cultural heritage, an approach that encourages a unified and international solution to the problem while allowing American museums to continue to collect responsibly on behalf of the American public.

On August 26, 2008, the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) with Cambodia was amended and extended for an additional five years. Of particular importance to the AAMD, Article II of the MOU was amended in order to strengthen the requirements for cultural exchange and collaborative efforts to enhance the capabilities of museums in Cambodia to care for, document and protect the cultural heritage of Cambodia. AAMD member museums have been very involved in these efforts, as detailed below, and the AAMD looks for continued and enhanced cooperation with the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia and with museums in

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Cambodia in order to strengthen the exchange programs that exist and enhance the collaborative efforts of Cambodian and American museums.

In October 2012, the AAMD surveyed approximately 30 member museums most likely to have an interest in Cambodia. The survey asked if the museums had a prospective interest in loans from Cambodia. Fourteen responded that they did. The responses to the survey also provided names of experts in the field with whom AAMD staff could speak. The staff had conversations with curators of Southeast Asian art, with conservators, and with a conservation scientist. Those conversations have informed this presentation.

After AAMD sent its initial survey to members, the Cultural Property Advisory Committee asked how many AAMD museums had actually requested loans from Cambodia in the last five years. The AAMD resurveyed those 14 museums that indicated they had an interest, to ask if they had requested any loans in the last five years that had been granted or denied. For various reasons, mentioned below, the members had not actively pursued long term loans, therefore making moot the question of loans denied. What the surveys did confirm was a deep, on-going interest in Cambodian antiquities and an equally deep involvement by a number AAMD museums in providing professional help, establishing laboratories and studios for the National Museum of Cambodia and collaboration in excavations and in exchange programs as well as in exhibition loans.

## **II. Long-Term Loans**

The AAMD surveys indicate that member museums have a keen interest in long-term loans of works from the National Museum of Cambodia and its provincial museums as opposed to exhibition loans, which are very costly to mount. There are however, impediments to applying for long-term loans. Some of the impediments appear to be particularly applicable to AAMD member regional museums. The first serious impediment to obtaining long-term loans is the absence of online inventories of works that might be available from Cambodian museums. Although discussion with several curators from larger museums indicated that inventories for the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh do exist, are often quite good and getting better, and that inventories of the provincial museum collections are actively under preparation, one must go to the museums to use them, which is not always possible for a U.S. regional museum. The second impediment is related to the first and, again, is experienced by regional museums. Their lack of interaction with (or knowledge of) colleagues in Cambodia makes requesting loans difficult. One curator from a regional museum, who echoed the concerns of several of her colleagues, said that she would “love to have a long-term loan from Cambodia around which she could create

programming that would engender a great deal of excitement in her community, but that she lacked the connections in Cambodia to effectuate such a loan.”

AAMD members look forward to working with their colleagues in Cambodia in order to realize this critical component of cultural exchange. The organizing of symposia for curators and directors of Cambodian and U.S. museums and other opportunities to network with colleagues would be extremely helpful and perhaps the AAMD could collaborate with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in convening such opportunities. Another goal should be capacity-building for Cambodian museum staff to enable them to put their collections online, as well as funding for this project, while remaining sensitive to the security issues that may be presented when collections are made public.

### **III Exhibition Loans.**

A number of members indicated an interest in exhibition loans and reported that such loans have taken place while others were in process.

For example in 2010 - 2011 *“Gods of Angkor: Bronzes from the National Museum in Cambodia”* traveled to the Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The exhibition of 36 bronze objects was in reciprocation for the assistance of the Freer | Sackler in setting up a metals conservation laboratory at the National Museum of Cambodia.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is preparing a 2014 exhibition from six Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia from which it is borrowing 22 - 24 works.

For both projects, cooperation with Cambodian colleagues in arranging these loans has been excellent as has that of the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, both of which have assisted with aspects of the exhibition.

### **IV. Other Collaborations.**

AAMD members have collaborated with Cambodian museums on a number of different topics, as contemplated by Article II of the MOU. This is being done without funding from either the Cambodian or the United States governments. The paper submitted to the committee by the Freer and Sackler Galleries gives an extensive explanation of the work those two museums are doing and have done for a considerable time in Cambodia.

In addition, scientists and curators from the Metropolitan Museum of Art have conducted research on stone with their counterparts in Cambodia since the 1980’s.

Samples are transported to the Metropolitan Museum of Art which shares the research findings with colleagues in Cambodia. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has also brought Cambodian scholars to New York to exchange information. While the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco currently does not borrow works from Cambodia, having a large permanent collection of its own, it does have considerable professional exchanges with Cambodian museum professionals. The Asian Art Museum has provided photographs of its collection to the National Museum of Cambodia and has welcomed each of the past two directors of the National Museum of Cambodia. Those visits have resulted in informational exchanges. The Asian Art Museum is hoping to welcome the new director of the National Museum of Cambodia shortly. In addition, the Asian Art Museum has a privately-funded Cambodian lecture series that brings Cambodian professionals to the San Francisco community.

In order for these collaborative efforts to continue and to grow, funding is of major importance. Also, continued efforts to streamline government approvals, for example for U.S. visas for visiting scholars and technicians, and Cambodian export permits for loans or samples are important.

## **V. Suggestions**

As U.S. museums evolve their collecting habits and acquire fewer antiquities, being able to borrow works from foreign museums, for both long-term and exhibition loans, becomes ever more important. Creating opportunities for U.S. museum professionals from a wide range of art museums to meet with their foreign colleagues, especially those who might be traveling in the U.S., is one way to help facilitate loans.

On-line data bases are of critical importance to the U.S. museum community and while the National Museum of Cambodia network has very good inventories in some instances, they can be accessed only in Cambodia. Such online databases of selected information as to objects would make requesting loans, particularly for regional U.S. museums, easier to facilitate.

As noted above, making information about inventories available on-line requires a capacity building effort for Cambodian museum staff as well as funding for this project. A further, but somewhat lesser complication to obtaining loans from Cambodia is a requirement that all loans be government to government which, we have been told, does work because the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia has been very helpful, but this restriction does add one or more additional layers to the process. If Cambodian curators and directors were able to deal directly and authoritatively with their American counterparts, that might well speed the process.

If collaboration is to take place, the U.S. and Cambodian governments must make visa applications for visiting scholars and museum professionals easier to obtain and facilitate export permits for scientific samples coming out of Cambodia.

## **VI. Concluding Remarks.**

For the reasons set forth above, the AAMD supports the renewal of the MOU. The AAMD does have one suggestion for an amendment to Article II (A) because the wording with respect to long-term loans appears to subsume those under the concept of temporary loans for exhibitions. As a result, we suggest the deletion of the words “including” and “whenever appropriate” in current subsection (A) so that the section would read as follows:

The Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia shall seek to expand the exchange of its archaeological material with U.S. institutions under circumstances that do not jeopardize its cultural patrimony, such as for temporary loans for exhibitions, long-term loans, and for other cultural, educational, and scientific purposes.