



Association of Art Museum Directors

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AAMD San Diego Meeting Featured Lively Discussion Of Current Issues Affecting America's Art Museums

New York, NY, February 2, 2009—More than 100 directors from art museums in the US, Canada, and Mexico met last week in San Diego for the Association of Art Museum Directors' (AAMD) mid-winter meeting. AAMD's member museums are cultural and educational institutions dedicated to making art a vital part of peoples' lives through museum collections, exhibitions, and public programs. As part of AAMD's mission to support its members, the Association hosted a series of panel discussions, committee meetings, and members' forums focusing on issues affecting art museums today. Among the topics addressed by the membership were: challenges to museum operations arising from the current economic climate; the impact of the contemporary art market on museum collecting; policies and practices relating to the deaccessioning (sale or dispersal) of works of art in museum collections; and new perspectives on fostering diversity in programs and staffing at art museums. In addition, the membership welcomed the newly appointed executive director of AAMD, Janet Landay.

On the subject of the economy, museum directors shared their recent experiences. Beyond the pressing difficulties of preserving programs and jobs, members also discussed strategic planning, collaborating with other institutions, programming, and new cost-saving energy and technology systems.

The membership also heard a presentation about successful strategies used by other organizations that have increased the diversity in their fields, and launched a long-term process for achieving similar goals for the art museum profession.

The deaccessioning conversation not only touched on the recent proposed sales involving Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum and the National Academy Museum, but also centered on a membership-wide reaffirmation of the vital importance of art collections as the heart of a museum's service to its community and to the general public.

In addition:

1. AAMD expressed its strong objection to Brandeis University's proposed plan to close the Rose Art Museum and sell its collection, and offered its support to the University in exploring alternatives to this drastic act.

2. AAMD affirmed its desire that the National Academy Museum desist from further deaccessioning, and reaffirmed the sanctions it has imposed on that institution. [Resolution attached.]
3. AAMD discussed the unprecedented partial deaccessioning by the Denver Art Museum of a work in its collection in order to jointly acquire another work of art, and agreed to revise its professional practice guidelines to discourage future transactions of this kind.

The Association of Art Museum Directors, representing 198 art museum directors in the US, Canada and Mexico, aids its members in establishing and maintaining the highest professional standards for themselves and the museums they represent. It serves as a forum for the exchange of information and the exploration of ideas, and as a voice with which museum directors may express their joint concerns and those of their institutions. Further information about AAMD's professional practice guidelines and position papers is available at www.aamd.org.

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Resolution Regarding AAMD's Censure and Sanction of the National Academy

AAMD's censure of the National Academy Museum is a response to that institution's violation of our key values and professional practices as art museums, in particular, that our collections are held in trust for the public and should not be treated as assets that may be liquidated for general operating support. These actions by AAMD stem from the members' conviction that collections are of vital importance and are at the heart of a museum's service to its community and to the general public.

Deaccessioning for operations deprives the public of access to these great works of art. A museum's sale of works from its collection in order to cover basic, everyday expenses such as utility bills and building maintenance, hurts the museum itself—because a museum is not merely a building, but rather the art within it. More than 90% of the works in America's art museums have been given by private individuals. These donations, large and small, have been encouraged by government tax policy in order to nurture and sustain the programming and educational services offered by institutions across the country to their communities. Converting the cultural patrimony of this great country into money to support institutional operations will result in fewer objects being given to public institutions, while audiences of all ages, present and future, will be deprived of these collections and the many programs that would accompany them.

The National Academy—which has historically been a members organization—has, since the 1980s, acted and advertised itself as an art museum through: museum accreditation; membership in the AAMD (since 1991); and exhibitions and programs for the public drawing on its collections. When following AAMD's Professional Practices was no longer convenient, the National Academy renounced its membership in an attempt at circumventing the rules and the potential consequences. When AAMD was informed that the National Academy had violated the Association's prohibition against using funds from deaccessioning for operations, AAMD censured and imposed sanctions on the National Academy.

In response to inquiries from its members, the board of AAMD is providing the following clarification on the nature and extent of its sanctions:

1. The censure of the National Academy is effective immediately.
2. The sanctions are effective immediately and, consistent with members' individual legal obligations, AAMD members should not lend to or accept loans from the National Academy, or collaborate with it on exhibitions.
3. The sanctions will remain in place indefinitely, but the AAMD board reserves the right to revisit its decision and encourages the National Academy to discuss with the AAMD actions the National Academy can take that would result in the suspension of sanctions.

We hope that the National Academy will recognize AAMD's code of ethics and professional practices for art museums, and will not continue to deaccession works of art from its collection for general operating support. We look forward to meeting with the National Academy's leaders to clarify their intentions for the future of the collection. We sincerely hope that the National Academy will in the future abide by the professional standards and ethics of art museums, and thereby reaffirm the importance above all of protecting its collections.

In the meantime, and until AAMD is satisfied with the National Academy's future course, the over 100 members of the AAMD present at the meeting voted unanimously to support and abide by these sanctions, as affirmed by this resolution.

Approved this day, January 30, 2009