

**Statement of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution (“Freer|Sackler”)
Presented by Louise Allison Cort***

**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**

This statement is made on behalf of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler, Smithsonian Institution, and the Association of Art Museum Directors (“AAMD”). The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery together form the Asian museum at the Smithsonian Institution. The two adjacent museums are managed by one director and staff, but the natures of their respective collections shape their distinctive activities. Although the Cambodia-related permanent collections of sculpture are small (one bronze sculpture in the Freer Gallery collection; six stone sculptures in the Sackler Gallery, given by Arthur M. Sackler before the gallery’s opening in 1987), the ceramics collection contains 80 Khmer stoneware ceramics and almost 400 ceramic sherds (gifts of Osborne and Gratia Hauge and Victor and Taka Hauge in 1996, acquired in Bangkok in the 1960s). Whereas the Freer Gallery displays only its own permanent collection and does not lend or borrow, the Sackler Gallery serves as the venue for loan exhibitions on aspects of Asian art and culture, while also displaying its own permanent collection.

The Freer|Sackler has maintained an active and mutually rewarding working relationship with the National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, for over sixteen years. Our first extensive contacts occurred when director Khun Samen and deputy director Hab Touch were resident in Washington during the 1997 National Gallery exhibition, *Millenium of Glory*. In 2002, Hab Touch visited again while holding an Asian Cultural Council grant for a six-month internship at the Brooklyn Museum. On a return visit in 2003, Khun Samen discussed with director Julian Raby and Paul Jett, head of our Department of Conservation and Scientific Research (“DCSR”), the possibility of receiving assistance to set up a metal conservation laboratory at the National Museum.

The Metal Conservation Laboratory project, which began in 2005 and included raising funds (with the Getty Foundation as principal funder), selecting and training staff, and equipping facilities, created the foundation of an effective partnership of mutual respect, responsibility and exchange between the two museums. The laboratory began operating in September 2007 and was joined, at the request of director Hab Touch, by a Ceramics Conservation Laboratory. Paul Jett has continued to visit Phnom Penh regularly to work with the staffs of both laboratories, providing guidance for fundraising and management with the goal of enabling the laboratories to operate self-sufficiently. The Metal Conservation lab staff has applied successfully for funding from various agencies, been involved in a

* Curator for Ceramics, Freer | Sackler, Smithsonian, cortlo@si.edu

number of outreach projects (helping with collections at temples and with recent archaeological finds), and taken in a number of students.

To celebrate and publicize the museum's new capacity, the National Museum accepted the Sackler Gallery's proposal to hold a loan exhibition of bronze objects. The thirty-six bronzes included several conserved in the new lab, notably a group of seven recently-excavated small figures acquired by the museum and treated as the lab's first service to an archaeological project. A further goal for the small, focused selection of one medium was to offer an alternative to the blockbuster exhibitions that had been the prevailing mode of presenting Cambodian art, and to provide a possible precedent for future loans to the Sackler and other foreign museums. Director Hab Touch offered essential support for obtaining required government permissions. The ambassador and cultural attaché at the US Embassy provided noteworthy logistical support for this project as they had for the conservation laboratories. The exhibition was curated by Paul Jett and Louise Cort, who drew on the museum's excellent electronic database and growing photographic record for preparing the catalogue. *Gods of Angkor: Bronzes from the National Museum of Cambodia* appeared at the Sackler Gallery (15 May 2010–23 January 2011) and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (22 February–14 August 2011).

The Freer|Sackler has hosted several National Museum staff members for various lengths of time and purposes. As part of the development of the Metal Conservation Laboratory, one lab member spent six months in the Freer|Sackler DCSR. Mrs. Sam Thida, education officer, participated in the 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival program on cultures along the Mekong. Several conservation lab staff served as couriers for *Gods of Angkor* loans and while in Washington observed museum procedures and received training. In 2011, Chhay Visoth, education and publication officer, spent one month at the museum as part of a multi-location internship funded by the Asian Cultural Council. He focused on education programs (especially for children) and development procedures, especially membership programs.

Meanwhile, several Freer|Sackler staff members have established close ties to the National Museum, receiving access to museum collections and records for research projects and offering support whenever possible. Paul Jett continues to collaborate on metals research projects and is currently involved in helping to inventory metal objects in collections of the provincial branch museums. Janet Douglas, conservation scientist and stone specialist in the DCSR, is engaged in a long-term project to source the stone used in sculptures in the National Museum collection. She has received samples from objects conserved in the museum's Stone Conservation Laboratory, and in return she has provided texts for gallery displays of stone sculpture and presented seminars to museum staff, in addition to presenting the research findings at international conferences and in published papers.

In 1997, researching the Sackler's Khmer ceramics, ceramics curator Louise Cort visited the museum to see ceramics on display and consult French-era object records, then kept as hand-written cards but now scanned and entered into the museum's database. On subsequent visits, access to objects in storage became possible. Recently Louise Cort and University of Hawai'i-based archaeologist Miriam Stark assisted the museum in preparing an agreement form to be signed by visiting researchers. Both Paul Jett and Louise Cort serve in the advisory group for Friends of Khmer Culture (FOKCI), which

offers major support to diverse National Museum projects. As part of a 2009 study tour to Cambodia for museum members, Julian Raby and Louise Cort brought the group to the National Museum, where they were briefed by Hab Touch and shown improvements in the galleries and storage.

These and other ongoing positive collaborations with the National Museum have formed the basis for contacts with Cambodian archaeologists and other scholars working outside the museum. Three archaeologists and the head of the Ceramics Conservation lab were invited participants in the 2007 Fourth Forbes Symposium at the Freer Gallery, "Scientific Research on Historic Asian Ceramics." In 2010, Cambodian archaeologists participated in a Luce Foundation-funded international workshop, "Southeast Asian Ceramic Archaeology: Directions for Methodology and Collaboration," co-organized by Louise Cort and Joyce White, Penn Museum, and held in Washington and Philadelphia. A follow-up workshop on kilnsite excavation methodology took place in Siem Reap in 2011. Again with Luce Foundation funding, Louise Cort is collaborating with archaeologists Ea Darith, APSARA (Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap) and Don Hein, Australia, to organize a kilnsite excavation training workshop for young archaeologists from Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, to take place in Siem Reap 25 February–1 April 2013.

The National Museum of Cambodia's new director, Kong Vireak, is an archaeologist who formerly taught at the adjacent Royal University of Fine Arts. He and his young and motivated staff play a central role in efforts to protect, conserve, display and elucidate Cambodia's cultural heritage. In recent years they have reinstalled the collection and overhauled gallery lighting and signage. Several special exhibitions have introduced new materials from recently excavated archaeological sites and have included a loan exhibition from France. The Freer|Sackler's association with this dynamic institution has been deeply rewarding, and we look forward to future collaborations.