



STATEMENT ON THE BERKSHIRE MUSEUM PROPOSAL TO DEACCESSION WORKS OF ART FOR ITS ENDOWMENT, OPERATIONS, AND TO FUND CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM), an organization representing the entire scope of the museum community, and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), an organization representing 243 directors of North America's leading art museums, are deeply opposed to the Berkshire Museum's plans to sell works from its collection to provide funds for its endowment, to make capital investments, and to pay for daily operations.

One of the most fundamental and long-standing principles of the museum field is that a collection is held in the public trust and must *not* be treated as a disposable financial asset. This prohibition is upheld by both AAMD and by AAM, which sets accreditation standards for art museums, science centers, natural history museums, and historical museums.

AAM and AAMD are communities of museum professionals founded to support museums, large and small, and the diverse communities they serve. Actions such as those being proposed by the Berkshire Museum undermine the public's trust in the mission of nonprofit museums—and museums' ability to collect, teach, study, and preserve works for their communities now and into the future.

Two of the works the Museum is currently planning to sell are important paintings by Norman Rockwell, given by the artist to the people of Pittsfield. These works were entrusted by Rockwell to the Museum for safe-keeping and to share with the public. The other works proposed for sale are by many noted artists from America and around the world. If these works are indeed sold, it would be an irredeemable loss for the present and for generations to come.

Selling from the collection for purposes such as capital projects or operating funds not only diminishes the core of works available to the public, it erodes the future fundraising ability of museums nationwide. Such a sale sends a message to existing and prospective donors that museums can raise funds by selling parts of their collection, thereby discouraging not only financial supporters, who may feel that their support isn't needed, but also donors of artworks and artifacts, who may fear that their cherished objects could be sold at any time to the highest bidder to make up for a museum's budget shortfalls. That cuts to the heart not only of the Berkshire Museum, but every museum in the United States.

The Berkshire Museum contends that in order to be a good steward of their institution they must be a poor steward of their collection. We believe those two responsibilities are not mutually exclusive. We are sympathetic to the financial challenges museums of all sizes may face. And we are heartened by the many creative solutions that museums across the country have developed to meet those challenges and uphold the professional standards of the field.

We have been in communication with the Berkshire Museum leadership and we continue to hope that they will reconsider their decision. We stand ready to assist, in any way we are able, to find other solutions to the institution's needs without resorting to the selling of works that can never be recovered.

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Additional Resources:

- [AAMD Policy on Deaccessioning](#)
- [AAM Code of Ethics](#)

About AAMD:

The Association of Art Museum Directors advances the profession by cultivating leadership capabilities of directors, advocating for the field, and fostering excellence in art museums. An agile, issues-driven organization, AAMD has three desired outcomes: engagement, leadership, and shared learning. Further information about AAMD's professional practice guidelines and position papers is available at www.aamd.org.

About AAM:

The American Alliance of Museums has been bringing museums together since 1906, helping to develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community. Representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, institutions, and corporate partners serving the museum field, the Alliance stands for the broad scope of the museum community. For more information, visit www.aam-us.org.

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