



ASSOCIATION OF ART MUSEUM DIRECTORS' STATEMENT ON DELAWARE ART MUSEUM BOARD VOTE TO DEACCESSION FOR OPERATING FUNDS

March 27, 2014—The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), an organization representing 240 directors of North America's leading art museums, is deeply disturbed to learn of the recent vote by the Board of Trustees of the Delaware Art Museum to sell works of art from its collection to provide funds to retire debt and pay for operating expenses. Selling works of art held in the public trust and using the proceeds for such purposes would represent a direct and serious violation of AAMD's Code of Ethics and the professional standards of the museum field.

Despite the Delaware Art Museum's statement that taking such a step is the only way to solve its long-standing financial problems, the AAMD firmly believes that there are viable alternatives to this course of action and that deaccessioning works from the collection is not necessary to sustain the Museum's operations.

AAMD leadership reached out to the Museum with an offer of help five months ago, after learning about its financial challenges and plans to consider selling works of art from its collection. Through the several exchanges the AAMD has had with the Museum's Trustees and professional leadership since then, the AAMD has consistently offered its support in finding an alternative resolution and has urged the Museum not to proceed with this plan.

AAMD's long-standing policy prohibiting the use of funds obtained through deaccessioning for any purpose other than the acquisition of works of art was developed to protect museums from pressure to monetize their collections to support operations. As such it has long been, and must remain, a core principle of our profession and a basic standard of professional museum practice.

The sale of a work (or works) of art from a museum's collection for any purpose other than the continued development of that collection represents a violation of the public trust and can seriously undermine the confidence of the public in the institution and weaken its ability to fulfill its mission. Such an action can also serve to discourage donors from supporting art museums and have a significant impact on fundraising over time. Furthermore, treating works of art from a museum's collection as financial assets not only damages the museum taking such an action, but also adversely affects the field as a whole.

Should the Board of Trustees of the Delaware Art Museum carry out the deaccessioning plan on which they voted yesterday, they will have taken a step that, although well-intentioned, will surely have a negative impact on the Museum's relationship with the community it was founded to serve, as well as with those who believe in the integrity of its collection and the responsibility of the Museum's trustees to be good stewards of this precious resource. Accordingly, AAMD will have no recourse but to consider

taking the strongest possible response to this action, including the censure and, if necessary, the sanctioning of the Museum.

The AAMD remains hopeful that the Board of Trustees of the Delaware Art Museum will further consider the many problems, reputational as well as operational, that can arise from the decision to deaccession works of art from the Museum's collection for the purpose of supporting operations. We also stand ready to assist this institution to find other solutions to the fiscal challenges that it faces without deaccessioning the works of art that have been entrusted into its care. Their sale would be the community's loss.

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The Association of Art Museum Directors—representing 240 art museum directors in the US, Canada, and Mexico—promotes the vital role of art museums throughout North America and advances the profession by cultivating leadership and communicating standards of excellence in museum practice. Further information about AAMD's professional practice guidelines and position papers is available at www.aamd.org.

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