

AIA STATEMENT ON MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS AND LOANS OF ANTIQUITIES AND ANCIENT ARTWORKS

RESPONSE TO THE AAMD REPORT ON THE LOAN OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ANCIENT ARTWORKS

In June 2004, the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) issued a “Report of the AAMD Task Force on the Acquisition of Archaeological Materials and Ancient Art” and in February 2006 issued its Guidelines for Incoming Loans. AIA applauds the renewed commitment of the museum community to the stewardship of the archaeological record through ethical acquisitions of antiquities. In several respects, however, the AAMD guidelines for revising institutional acquisition policies fail to address the unique nature of archaeological artifacts and contexts:

- The guidelines do not emphasize the responsibility of museums to investigate thoroughly the provenance of art and artifacts under consideration for acquisition. To the extent possible, the complete history of ownership back to the original archaeological findspot must be documented, and full information on provenance history should be made publicly available.
- The guidelines do not conform to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics (2001 version) and fail to require that acquisitions comply with the laws of the country of origin and of any intermediary countries through which the artifact has been transferred.
- The provision that museums should not acquire ancient art or artifacts unless they have been outside the country of origin for a period of ten years does not protect museums from a restitution claim from the country of origin or other original owner. Furthermore, in view of the fact that unscrupulous art dealers frequently hold such materials for many years, it fails to provide any meaningful disincentive to the looting of archaeological sites.
- By recommending that museums not acquire archaeological objects from *official* excavation sites, the guidelines ignore clear evidence that most undocumented antiquities come from unrecorded sites that are not the subject of authorized excavations or from remote locations that are most prone to looting.
- In the absence of documentation, the guidelines permit museums to acquire antiquities whose rarity, importance, and aesthetic values make a “singular and material contribution.” The suggestion that undocumented objects may be better preserved or more accessible in a museum setting is also set forth as a valid consideration. Such a broad loophole

sanctions the acquisition of virtually any antiquity, despite the likelihood that high quality, previously unrecorded objects may be the product of recent site looting. It ignores the overarching goal of protecting artifacts in situ along with their original historical and archaeological context.

In the light of ongoing theft and looting of ancient sites, monuments, museums, and repositories, the adverse impact of the trade in undocumented artifacts must inform any decision to acquire such materials. AIA calls on AAMD, other museum professional organizations and individual museums to adopt rigorous procedures for the acquisition of ancient art and archaeological artifacts.