Task Force for the Protection of University Collections

• First, a story
  • Why Museum XXX did not sell its masterpiece ....
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  • Why Museum XXX did not sell its masterpiece ....

• Discretion
• Board: Context
• Director: Support & Information
Task Force for the Protection of University Collections

- Association of Academic Museums & Galleries (AAMG)
  - Jill Deupi (University of Miami, Lowe Art Museum), co-chair
  - John Wetenhall (The George Washington University Museum), co-chair
- American Alliance of Museums (AAM)
- International Council of Museums -- International Committee for University Museums and Collections (ICOM-UMAC)
- Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD)
- Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC)
- College Art Association (CAA)
- The Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Sponsor
  - Max Marmor, President
- et. al.
Task Force Goals

• Unneeded
• Unnoticed
• Dissuade Leadership from Monetizing Collections for Operations
• Isolate Violations to Avert Precedents
Task Force Actions

• Unneeded
  • Inform/Educate
  • Deaccessioning “Tool Kit” @ AAMG website

• Unnoticed
  • Confer/Meet privately

• Dissuade Leadership from Monetizing Collections for Operations
  • Meet/Write/Associations take actions as warranted

• Isolate Violations to Avert Precedents
  • Support actions by Associations, as warranted
Monetizing Collections: Inappropriate use of proceeds from sale of deaccessioned objects

• Fiduciary Duty to Preserve Collections for Future Generations
  • Monetization cannibalizes the purpose of the museum

• History of past abuses do not indicate a path to success
  • Short-term

• Field-wide prohibition protects other museums
  • Collection as “cash reserve” disincentives fund-raising

• See: Stephen Weil, “The Deaccession Cookie Jar,” A Cabinet of Curiosities
Deaccessioning Issues & Deterrents to the Monetization of Collections

• Legal Restrictions
• Accounting Guidelines (FASB 116, 11.a.b.c.)
• Contracts/Gift Agreements
• Museum Ethics
• Accreditation Standards
• Moral Obligations (donor intent)

• Coming Soon: AAMG Deaccession “Tool Kit”
  • central reference resource @aamg-us.org
The Allure of Monetization Is Amplified in Universities

• Conflicting Fiduciary Duties
  • Museum Mission → Educational Mission

• Attractive Value of Collections
  • $$$ for operations → Endowment or Special Projects

• Crisis?
  • Survival → Accreditation & Institutional Stability

• Problem Solvers
  • Museum Board → University Trustees

• Uncertainty

• Isolated Director (Task Force assists)
University Museums Have Profoundly Changed

**Gallery**
- Department
- Department Chair or Dean
- Discipline-Focused
- “Budget” or Alumni Donors
- Limited attendance

**Museum**
- University Community & Public
- Provost or President
- Cross-Disciplinary
- Alumni and Community Donors
- “Front Door” to Campus
Protecting Collections During the Pandemic

- Isolated cases, handled discretely
  - Proposal by university administrators/financial officers
  - Proposal by faculty

- Confusion by Policy: AAMD response to the pandemic
  - 2 year hiatus on sanctions
  - Citation of AAM’s concept of “Direct Care,” absent definition

- Confusion by Complexity
  - Equating “Deaccessioning” with “Monetization”
    - Conflating Strategy and Ethics
  - Confusing high-market-value and low-value deaccessioning
  - Undefined applications of “Direct Care”
Equating “Deaccessioning” with “Monetization”

- Selling collection objects to purchase other works: Strategy
  - Baltimore
  - Syracuse
- Selling objects for operating cash: Ethics
Confusing High-Value and Low-Value Deaccessioning Issues

• Protecting monetization at the top has stifled deaccessioning at the bottom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Collection Quantity</th>
<th>$ Market Value</th>
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• “We have so many objects, so why don’t we sell …?”
Undefined “Direct Care”

• “Care”
  • Broaden acceptable use of deaccessioning proceeds (vs. purchase)
  • Discipline-Specific (Historic House Museums)
  • Conservation of Objects
  • Other uses: “Pruning” Collections? Sharing? Repatriation?

• “Direct” vs. “Indirect”
  • Conservation Treatment vs. Conservation Lab
  • Research for Deaccessioning vs. Curatorial Research
  • Billable Hours vs. Endowment
What Do We Need?

• Reestablish the boundaries around field-wide deaccessioning ethics
  • Prevent the sale of high-priced collection objects to fund operational needs and university overhead or alternative uses
  • Preserve FASB accounting standards
  • Preserve the public trust

• Define “direct care” (AAMD) to liberate deaccessioning proceeds to improve existing collections:
  • Conservation (turn unusable objects into “new acquisitions”)
  • Due diligence for future deaccessioning (reduce overcrowded storage)
  • Collection sharing? (invest in the public interest)
  • Repatriation/Restitution? (an ethical collection is a better collection)
Beyond Our Scope: Closure and Dispersal

• If the university closes the chemistry department, must it keep the lab equipment?

• Collection dispersal as a matter of ...
  • Law
  • Ethics
  • Public Interest

• If a collection object is sold to a private buyer, is the public interest compromised? (does benefit to creditors vs. non-profit inst. matter?)

• What happens to low-value objects?