

ASM Museum Chat 11  
June 15, 2011

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Hi Jerrie

Jerrie: Wow! Am I the first?

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): yes you are

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Otherwise just Me and Maeghan on right now

Moderator (LAM): [waves]

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Maeghan is my wingman

Jerrie: Hi, Maeghan.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): How are things up on Haines?

Jerrie: Good. Today is a cruise ship day, and sunny. It usually rains on our once a week cruise ship days.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Didn't one of the ships not come last week?

Jerrie: It's great having Kathy back. She said she enjoyed spending time with you and Carson.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Hi Monica

Jerrie: It was supposed to come yesterday. They were disinfecting it after the bad virus made over 100 people sick last week.

Monica: Hi, all

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): So Jerrie, you did not lose the ship it was just a day late?

Jerrie: No. About 4 times during the summer we have an extra ship on Tuesday. That one was an extra ship.

Jerrie: Hi, Monica.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Oh got it

Monica: I wanted to ask about accepting donations of objects for us to sell. That is, ones that fall within our collecting scope but duplicate our collection. And the donor wants us to sell.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Monica, I have heard of this before

Monica: How does ASM deal with it?

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I don't think there is an ethical problem with that.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I could ask Steve if that has come up

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I will admit that mostly museums sell objects that are not in their scope

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): but I don't really see a problem with it as long as it is not accessioned in your collection

Monica: We were discussing the perception outside of the museum. Since people may perceive that we are selling "everything".

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That is a good point

Monica: Even if it's not accessioned.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): You might have to do a little PR beforehand.

Jerrie: This comes up on museum lists once in a while. As long as that is the purpose of the donation and the museum makes it clear, there is usually no problem.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I agree Jerrie

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): It is sort of like if the owner wants to sell it and give you the money that would be fine, so the museum is really just selling it in lieu of the owner

Monica: That's true. Maybe we could have her deal with it. Or, have her work with a dealer...

Monica: Also, some of the items are artifacts. Which we don't collect anymore.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Some things to consider with multiple stuff is that if it is drawn out over a longer period of time it might appear like a museum fire sale

Monica: exactly

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I would suggest selling it all at one event or one time

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): You can control the message easier that way

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Your question Monica brings up a bigger issue that I am interested in

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That being the perception that museums are somehow supposed to be saving everything or collecting everything

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I feel strongly that we need to curate the museums collection and part of that curation is not collecting some things. Selling an item that is donated for the purpose of raising money for the museum is part of that "not collecting"

Monica: Yes, there is difficulty sometimes distinguishing what and what not to collect.

Monica: Here, at least, we have a separate association, where those types of donations (for selling) can be given. But, we need to make certain that we don't just become dealers

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That does shield the museum a bit.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): You are never going to protect from everyone's misconceptions but at least your big donors will understand

Monica: That's true. But, there are supporters of the museum, not big donors, but hugely active, that we don't want to mislead.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I still think the fact that the items are not accessioned and were donated for that purpose puts you in the clear for ethical issues.

Monica: True. Now, the added twist. This same donor would like us to pay for some of the items that we will keep. So, in essence, we would be selling part of her collection in order to purchase other items from her collection.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): oh

Monica: Confusing I know. Not sure if we want to go down this path.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Yes let's go down that path

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I think it is an interesting twist

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Let me think about this for a sec

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): This could actually get tricky

Monica: Aaron and I have been talking about this week. It's only come up this week.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I wonder if there are legal issues

Monica: Exactly.

Monica: Because she's elderly, and a former dealer, she's not interested in selling it herself.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I guess it does not really matter where the money comes from because you could be paying the donor from some other fund anyway

Jerrie: Even beyond legal, it seems that she was taking advantage of the museum.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That could be Jerrie

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): But the museum is really benefitting

Monica: I hadn't thought of it like that. But, that's true.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I think where the ethics come in is if the sale of the items by the museum is somehow inflating the value. Then the donor could be gaining an advantage

Monica: Since, the items to sell would not be things we want. But we would want the others...

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I don't really have a problem with the two parts of the collection issue

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): So one part you want and the other you don't, I think that happens often

Monica: Good point, about inflating the value.

Monica: Well, the part we don't want are things that we specifically do not collect anymore - anything archaeological in nature.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Oh selling archaeological collections in and of itself can be tricky. There might be a perception issue there as well. If it were art or stuff made to sell that is not as tricky. There are some people who think that no archaeological materials should be for sale

Monica: That's our dilemma. Should I even spend time trying to talk her into a different arrangement, or should I just say no?

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): So is this Alaskan archaeological material?

Monica: Yes, purchased on St. Lawrence, when she used to go there.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Well St. Lawrence is a special case

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): But not without controversy.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That is a tough one

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): What are the stuff that would be purchased?

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): This is turning into a great ethical question

Monica: Saami clothing - she wants them here, but can't donate them.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Sami clothing is cool

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Would the selling of the archaeological material take place in Alaska?

Monica: One way we're thinking about it, is to buy the clothing outright, accept some of her Alaska collection, and refuse any of the archaeological material.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Hi Aurora

Aurora Lang: Hi! Sorry I'm late

Monica: The archaeological material would be sold...who knows? I haven't a clue.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): No Problem, we are having a very interesting ethical discussion

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I still don't think you would be running afoul of ethical issues but the perception issue is starting to look really bad

Monica: Yes, and the more I talk about it, the less I want to even go down this path.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I am sure big art museums have had such cozy relationships with dealers before but look what trouble the Getty got into

Monica: That's true. And, I think Anchorage. Museum had some issues years ago too.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Yeah it may not be worth the potential hit to your reputation

Aurora Lang: I know I'm late to the conversation, but why is the donor expecting you to make the sell?

Monica: She's older and doesn't want to deal with the details, I think. But, feels the right place for these items is here.

Monica: She has a relationship with the Field Museum, but doesn't want these things to go there.

Aurora Lang: Would it ruin your relationship with her if you don't accept the objects?

Monica: I'm not sure how she'll react. It'll be touch and go. I'm not sure that I'm too concerned though, since she's not been a member or supporter previously.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): My gut instinct is that if it were anything but archaeological materials, the public perception might not be an issue. I like you plan of just buying the Sami stuff outright if you can afford it.

Monica: Yes, we'll probably go down that route. If we can afford it.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I am going to post a long message that I recently got from Steve Henrikson our Curator of Collections in response to a query about a museum buying archaeological and found materials

Monica: Thanks, I'd love to read it.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): From Steve: Yes, a sticky situation. Some museums take a hard line and won't collect any undocumented archaeological material. They don't want to support in any way the market for that material. We take that approach, thinking that the priority should be on keeping things in the ground until they are excavated in a professional manner to save both the object and the context/history.

Also, as I'm sure you're familiar with, many of the pothunted objects are not cared for properly, and my guess is that many of them self destruct before they even make it to the market. Of course, just because "professional" archaeologists excavate a site doesn't necessarily mean the objects are well cared for....but at least there's a better chance that the preservation needs will be addressed.

Then there is material taken out long ago and offered as a donation...perhaps that would be a way to secure items useful to the museum and avoid supporting the contemporary trade in that material.

Another issue is the inadvertent finding of items on or near the surface that are already decontextualized by Mother Nature. These items will be destroyed if someone doesn't collect them. Possibly museums could collect that type of material without supporting the market for dug artifacts.

Finally, ownership is an important aspect of these questions: do the people recovering this material have legal title? Much of the washed out material is under state ownership, if from intertidal zones or the beds of navigabl

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That was all Steve's response So I guess we wouldn't collect it or probably sell it for her

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): That was a great question Monica and I really enjoyed the discussion

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Was there anything more you wanted to add?

Monica: Nope, I appreciate the discussion. Thanks!

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Anybody else?

Jerrie: It was very interesting. Good luck, Monica.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Other questions or discussion topics?

Monica: I need to go, thanks everyone. Bye.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): No Problem, nice having you Monica and Aaron

Aurora Lang: bye Monica

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Aurora did you have any questions?

Aurora Lang: Not at the moment, but probably 5 minutes after this chat ends.

Aurora Lang: I'll just save them for next month in that case

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Well if there are no more questions we can all get back to our museum business

Aurora Lang: Thanks for an interesting talk. I'm curious to read the transcript later.

Aurora Lang: What's next month's topic?

Jerrie: Okay. Thanks, Scott.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): I don't have a topic picked out yet. It seems that in the summer people are busy

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): So I didn't plan on a themed chat until the fall

Aurora Lang: I'll start writing down all my questions then

Jerrie: Sounds good. Bye.

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): Thanks for joining in

Aurora Lang: See you then! Bye!

Moderator (Scott Carrlee): See you all later