American art inspires. And fascinates. And sparks conversation. And Art Bridges Foundation is here bring great American art to your museum.

We work with museums of all sizes to create and support art installations and fund programs that educate, inspire, and deepen engagement with local audiences. Choose works from artists like Ana Mendieta, Mark Bradford, Kay WalkingStick, and more! Let’s work together to find the right artists and programs for your space. Connect with us at artbridgesfoundation.org!

Who can we bring to you?

Scan the QR code to see the Art Bridges Collection, and let’s plan something amazing together.
Thriving Museums, Healthy Communities

Join thousands of museum professionals in Baltimore, May 16-19, for the 2024 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo to connect and explore **museums’ essential role in promoting health and well-being** across four thematic tracks:

**Personal**
Engaging conversations that delve into the profound importance of mental and emotional health and well-being.

**Organizational**
Sharing how prioritizing staff well-being is critical to supporting personal and community well-being, as well as operational viability.

**Community**
Individual flourishing is deeply intertwined with connectedness, livability, equity, and access within communities.

**Society**
Exploring museums’ profound impact and indispensable role in society’s well-being and health outcomes.

Be a part of AAM 2024!

Learn more and sign up for updates: annualmeeting.aam-us.org
FEATURES

20 The Yaqui Case
In 2022, the National Museums of World Culture in Sweden returned ceremonial items to the Indigenous Yaquis in Mexico.
By Adriana Muñoz

26 What Endures
The Denver Museum of Nature & Science is committed to voluntary returns when morally, ethically, or commonsensically justified.
By Stephen E. Nash

32 The Art of Restitution
Museums need to go beyond the letter of the law and uphold a high ethical standard in building and maintaining our collections.
By Victoria Reed

38 Beyond Compliance
At the McClung Museum, a NAGPRA assessment strengthens collaboration with Native Nations on a current and future exhibition.
By Cat Shteynberg, Claudio Gómez, and Sadie Counts

DEPARTMENTS

5 Message from the Center for the Future of Museums
6 Timeline
8 First Look
16 Point of View
Trouble at Home
44 Alliance in Action
47 Tributes and Transitions
48 Reflection
Integrating Control Simplicity

**Wireless DMX Track** Feeds are used to add wireless DMX control into any CONTROLTrack installation. Our patented Wireless DMX Track Feed receives wireless data transmission from a multiverse transmitter and outputs a DMX signal to the CONTROLTrack and DMX fixtures. Each Wireless DMX Feed can control up to (32) fixtures and can transmit DMX up to 400’ of track. Wireless Wonder!

| Lighting Services Inc | The premier specialty lighting manufacturer |

---

*LSI*
OFFICERS
Chair (2023–2025)
Jorge Zamanillo, National Museum of the American Latino
Vice Chair & Secretary (2023–2025)
Nathan Richie, Golden History Museum and Park
Treasurer (2023–2024)
Devon Akmon, Michigan State University Museum and CoLab Studio
Immediate Past Chair (2022–2023)
Chevy Humphrey, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

TERM OF OFFICE 2023–2026
Carrie Rebora Barratt, LongHouse Reserve
Frederic Bertley, Center of Science and Industry
Alison Rempel Brown, Science Museum of Minnesota
Jessica Chavez, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago
Larry Dubinski, The Franklin Institute
Charles L. Katzenmeyer, Field Museum
Patsy Phillips, IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts

TERM OF OFFICE 2021–2024
Dina Bailey, Mountain Top Vision
Carole Charnow, Boston Children's Museum
Ann Friedman, Planet Word
Linda Harrison, The Newark Museum of Art
Julissa Marenco, Smithsonian Institution
Karol Wight, Corning Museum of Glass

TERM OF OFFICE 2022–2025
Marcia DeWitt, Biggs Museum of American Art
Leaps of Faith

As the Alliance searches for our new president and CEO, I have the pleasure of stepping in to pen this introduction. This issue of the magazine is part of a larger AAM project exploring the next horizon of museum practice with regard to voluntary repatriation, restitution, and reparations (read more on this project on page 46).

The articles in this issue provide a window into these new practices, illustrating how museums are reexamining issues of ownership and control of collections and reframing their work around new values. Taken as a set, they constitute a snapshot of a sector in the midst of profound transformation.

The McClung Museum highlights the voids left by removing Belongings (human remains and associated funerary objects) in their permanent exhibition “Archaeology and the Native Peoples of Tennessee.” By so doing, they pull back the curtain on the values underlying these decisions, calling attention to the “previous and outmoded conventions” that had guided their practice. In the future, might transparency about the process of creating exhibitions be considered as important as the finished product? The Denver Museum of Nature & Science set a goal to curate the “best understood and most ethically held anthropology collection in North America.” What changes might result from more museums measuring the importance of collections with a yardstick based on ethical values?

These articles also illustrate the complexities museums encounter as they pioneer new practices. The National Museums of World Culture had to thoughtfully navigate diverse opinions among descendant and source communities regarding whether material should be returned at all and, if so, to whom. In Point of View, Ndubuisi Ezeluomba explains the “kata kata for house” (confusion at home) among communities and individuals in Nigeria regarding the return of the Benin Bronzes. And, he notes, while repatriation is an important issue, what museums on the African continent really need are partnerships and funding.

The authors also illuminate issues on which museums have yet to reach consensus. Victoria Reed, writing from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, proposes that an object’s “desirability to others” should not be taken into account when deciding whether to restitute it. (If, for example, “it was legally sold but would take pride of place in a small town.”) The National Museums of World Culture, however, decided to return sacred material legally gifted to them by Yaqui individuals because of the objects’ importance to the Yaqui community.

There will rarely be clear, universally agreed upon answers to the issues raised during this process of change. As Reed notes, “Decisions about restitution must be based on a solid foundation of research, but they also call for small leaps of faith. We must be comfortable taking those leaps if we are to act ethically rather than strictly legally.”

Museums can lead each other forward, being brave enough to take such leaps and to accept the messy process of creating better futures.

Elizabeth Merritt is the Vice President, Strategic Foresight, and Founding Director of AAM’s Center for the Future of Museums.
## Signals of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>The Museum of the American Indian complies with a request from 12 members of the Hidatsa Water Buster (Midi Badi) Clan of the Hidatsa Tribe in North Dakota for the voluntary return of a sacred medicine bundle. This action is often cited as the first known successful repatriation in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs at the United States Department of State releases the “Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art”—11 nonbinding principles that provide a framework for nations to respond to issues of unresolved restitution, affirming the need to achieve “a just and fair solution.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>The Denver Museum of Nature &amp; Science identifies 30 vigango (wooden ancestor statues) in its collection as items that, due to their cultural and religious significance, should not be held in a museum. Museum staff work with the Mijikenda people in Kenya to repatriate the material beginning in 2019.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2021
Museums Aotearoa, a membership organization for New Zealand museums, issues the National Repatriation Policy for Kōiwi Tangata and Associated Burial Taonga within Aotearoa, which focused on ancestral human remains and associated burial artifacts held by museums. The publication offers “guidance for museums in taking an ethical approach to the respectful management of kōiwi tangata within their care, with a presumption that repatriation to the source community should be the outcome wherever possible.”

2022
The Smithsonian Institution institutes a new policy on ethical returns, approved by the Smithsonian Board of Regents, a body that includes congressionally appointed members of both political parties. This paves the way for the transfer of ownership of 29 Benin Bronzes to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria the following December. Nine of these objects will remain with the Smithsonian on long-term loan.

2023
The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums launches the Going Home Fund with support from the Mellon Foundation. To facilitate the return of culturally significant items, the fund will serve as a conduit for individuals and organizations wishing to return items and build connections between tribal communities and non-Native collecting institutions and individuals.
Science History Institute Museum & Library

Drawing on unique collections of dye sample books, vivid clothing, and scientific instruments, “BOLD: Color from Test Tube to Textiles” explores more than 150 years of efforts to expand our access to color. Taking visitors on a colorful journey through the history of science, with stops at coal mines, factory floors, and fashion runways, “BOLD” examines scientists’ efforts to understand these impacts and dye makers’ efforts to produce color more sustainably.

**Location:** Philadelphia, PA  
**Dates:** through summer 2024  
**Learn more:** sciencehistory.org/visit/exhibitions/bold-color-from-test-tube-to-textile/

Montclair Art Museum

Inspired by a show at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) in 2021, “Taking Space: Contemporary Women Artists and the Politics of Scale” displays 10 stunning artworks from PAFA alongside foundational works from the Montclair Art Museum’s collection of American women artists. Together they reveal the varied approaches of women artists for whom space is a critical feature of their work.

**Location:** Montclair, NJ  
**Dates:** through Jan. 7  
**Partner:** Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts  
**Learn more:** montclairartmuseum.org/exhibition/taking-space-contemporary-women-artists-and-politics-scale

Adirondack Experience, The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake

“Artists & Inspirations in the Wild” is a permanent exhibition featuring the Adirondacks’ rich artistic heritage defined by a distinct sense of place. From the first people to inhabit the region through today’s digital creators, artists have been deeply inspired by the beauty of this vast landscape. The exhibition’s approximately 250 works illustrate the rich traditions of Adirondack art and offer insight into artists’ own views about the natural wonders of the region.

**Location:** Blue Mountain Lake, NY  
**Learn more:** theadkx.org/exhibitions/artistsandinspiration/artists-inspiration-in-the-wild/
Launching the new AAM Member Resource Library!

As a part of our investment in the museum community, we’re proud to announce the launch of our new member resource library, redesigned with new functions to help you find the resources you need and the inspiration you want!

Browse over 2,000 articles, tip sheets, guides, and on-demand programs across 23 topic areas and filter by resource type or sub-category.

Explore the new Resource Library today!
Log in to unlock member-only resources. Visit: aam-us.org/resource-library

Our newly redesigned resource library is in beta, with additional features—including search functions—coming soon.

Read more about AAM’s investment in the museum community: bit.ly/museum-community-investment
Newport Mansions

“The Celestial City: Newport and China” explores China’s deep influence on Newport, Rhode Island, from the 18th century through the Gilded Age (1865–1915), when the city emerged as America’s premier summer playground and the fall of China’s last imperial dynasty transformed the ancient nation. On display are Chinese art collected by Newport merchants, historic photographs of Newport’s early Chinese community, and the writings and heirlooms of Chinese suffragists who helped launch the fight for women's rights in Newport and the United States.

Location: Newport, RI
Dates: through Feb. 11
Learn more: newportmansions.org/events/the-celestial-city-

Bechtler Museum of Modern Art

The double-sided film installation Flora and accompanying work Bust (both 2017) spotlight the life of Flora Mayo, who in the 1920s studied alongside Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris and had a romantic relationship with him. The majority of Mayo’s oeuvre has been lost or destroyed, and her biography was previously relegated to a footnote in Giacometti’s scholarship. Teresa Hubbard/Alexander Birchler reframe this story from a feminist perspective, bringing Mayo’s compelling biography to life through a hybrid form of storytelling that weaves together narration, reenactment, and documentary.

Location: Charlotte, NC
Dates: through Jan. 21
Partner: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Learn more: bechtler.org/
Collection/Teresa-hubbard-alexander-birchler-flora

The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum

Quilts, like maps, trace the personal stories and experiences of makers and their communities, often illuminating larger historical events and cultural trends. “Handstitched Worlds: The Cartography of Quilts” draws from the collection of the American Folk Art Museum, with examples ranging from traditional early-American quilts to contemporary sculptural assemblages.

Location: Washington, DC
Dates: through Dec. 23
Partner: American Folk Art Museum
Learn more: museum.gwu.edu/handstitched-worlds-cartography-quilts
THE FIRST HORIZON:

Understanding the State of Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations Today

This issue of Museum is part of AAM’s recently launched project, The Next Horizon of Museum Practice: Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations.

DIVE DEEPER

Read a new report—the project’s first publication from our Center for the Future of Museums—for an overview and timeline of recent developments in reparative practice. The report is designed to help the museum sector:

» identify shortcomings of museums’ current practices for redress,

» envision preferred futures for museums’ relationships with descendant communities, and

» navigate the changes required to reach those alternatives.

Visit bit.ly/reparative-practices to download the report, learn more about this project, and discover what’s to come and opportunities to get involved.

This report and the Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations project are generously supported by:

DAVID BERG FOUNDATION
Japanese American National Museum

The Japanese American National Museum has launched the public phase of its historic $65 million comprehensive fundraising campaign, which includes a renovation of the museum’s galleries and a new core exhibition, “In the Future We Call Now: Realities of Racism, Dreams of Democracy.” The exhibition spans the period from early immigration in the 1800s to today, including interpretive strategies that allow visitors to reckon with and understand experiences and issues of the past and the future.

Location: Los Angeles, CA
Learn more: janm.org/give/our-promise

Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University

“Shouldn’t You Be Working? 100 Years of Working from Home” explores how work in the domestic sphere has undergone tremendous changes over the past century. Drawing from the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum’s own collection, it presents a wide variety of labor practices connected to the home, past and present: from nannies and homemakers to manservants and temporary construction workers, and the wide variety of home-based practices by Indigenous craftspeople.

Location: East Lansing, MI
Dates: through Dec. 17
Learn more: broadmuseum.msu.edu/exhibition/shouldnt-you-be-working/

Muskegon Museum of Art

“Oddities and Delights” is an exploration of the fun, whimsical, and strange artworks in the museum’s permanent collection, including fantastical vehicles made from discarded parts, a chest freezer transformed into a cow, fabric-skinned cats with visible wooden skeletons, a two-headed deer in bronze, and a cheeseburger meal with fries and a drink rendered in glass. From the historically curious to the visually offbeat, these objects offer a very different perspective on our visual culture.

Location: Muskegon, MI
Dates: through Feb. 25
Learn more: muskegonartmuseum.org/exhibition/oddities-delights-from-the-mma-collection/

What’s New at Your Museum?

Do you have a new temporary or permanent exhibition, education program, partnership/initiative, or building/wing? Tell us at bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM, and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.
We champion the museum field so you can champion these moments.

In the face of unprecedented challenges brought about by the global pandemic, museum professionals demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. This resilient spirit fostered a deeper appreciation for their work. Our sector is still recovering. **Together, we can keep this momentum going in the new year.**

Membership dues cover only a small portion of our work. **Your donation, of any amount, counts.**

**Make a 100% tax-deductible gift today — aam-us.org/DONATE**

Your support allows AAM to continue to nurture professional excellence and champion the museum field—thank you!

This year, AAM was awarded a Platinum Seal of Transparency, the very highest level attainable from Candid. We hope this transparency gives you added confidence in our mission, accomplishments, and commitment to you.

If you are interested in making a planned gift to AAM, please contact Jennifer Calvert Hall at 202 289-9120 or jcalverthall@aam-us.org.
26. Large Paleozoic Fish
Dunkleosteus, Falls of Ohio SP, IN

27. Largest-known squid
Architeuthis, Sanibel Is. Shell Mus.

28. Largest-known ammonite
N. A. Museum of Ancient Life, UT

29. Burgess Shale Marrella
x12, R. Tyrrell Museum, Alberta

30. Giant orthocone cephalopod
Denver Mus. N.H., CO

31. Orb weaver spider x200
Sterneberg Museum, KS

32. Burgess Shale Sidneyia
x12, R. Tyrrell Museum, Alberta

33. Largest-known mollusk
Trigona, Swedish NMNH, Stockholm

34. Kemp’s ridley sea turtle
x1
S. Padre Island Nature Center, TX

35. Giant deep-sea vent worms
Museo Civico di Zoologia di Roma, Italy

CHASE STUDIO
EXHIBIT DIVISION OZARK MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
205 WOLF CREEK RD • CEDARCREEK, MO 65627
417-794-3303 • WWW.CHASESTUDIO.COM

Celebrating 50 years of producing the world’s highest quality natural history models and exhibits.
Eronmwon Iyase (plaque of an Iyase), ca. 16th century, Brass Igun guild of casters, Benin City, Benin Kingdom (Nigeria). Purchased by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1983.
Trouble at Home

Controversy swirls around the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes.

By Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba

Repatriation of art stolen from the Kingdom of Benin during the late 1800s in what is now Nigeria continues to gather momentum in the West. Numerous cultural institutions in Europe have begun to deinstall and return some of these art and artifacts to Nigeria. In North America, few institutions have actively deinstalled and returned works belonging to Benin, though, notably, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York have done so. And many others have begun the process.

The Nigeria quasi-federal system has three major tiers: the national (president), states (governors), and local governments (chairmen). There is also a fourth tier: the traditional council that encompasses traditional institutions (where kings and chiefs are located). It had been expected that the national government would give officials in the state of Edo and the local government in Benin City authority over the artifacts return.

However, in March 2023, before the end of President Muhammadu Buhari’s term, the Nigerian federal government published its decision that the Oba of Benin—the traditional ruler and the custodian of the culture of the Benin people of Edo state—should henceforth be solely responsible for the collection and care of all the Benin art and artifacts returning to the country. This (overly political) declaration ignored the state and local governments in addition to the work of the Nigerian government’s National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), which had been handling negotiations for the return of art and artifacts. This move can be read in Nigeria as kata kata for house, or confusion at home.

Because the return of Benin bronzes is occurring voluntarily, and strictly on moral and ethical grounds rather than through any legal statute, intellectuals and cultural workers in the West have led the charge in determining the repatriation of this art. But how are people within Benin City, Nigeria, or on the African continent reacting to these discussions about voluntary repatriation and the government’s decision to give custody of the returning items to the Oba of Benin? I’ve spoken to a variety of individuals within Benin City, the capital of the Edo state, to understand the changing perceptions about repatriation from within the city and the country in general.

Repatriation Reactions in Nigeria

The federal government’s edict regarding the return of Benin art objects did not sit well with many in Nigeria, especially those within the state government who have done much of the heavy lifting on preparing for the care and display of these objects upon their return to Benin City. The once novel idea of creating a world-class museum within Benin City is now a thing of the past. The proposed Edo Museum of West African Art (EMOWAA) will now be the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA), with Andiarea Emelife, a British/Nigerian curator of contemporary art, at its helm. MOWAA will not have access to the returning Benin art and artifacts as was initially planned.
for EMOWAA. The name change by Governor Godwin Obaseki symbolizes the confusion within Benin City and Nigeria in general. Reactions from within Benin City and the larger Nigerian nation are varied. I spoke with Mr. Godfrey Ekator, the Secretary of the Institute of Benin Studies, on August 14, 2023. He told me that he believed “the federal government’s declaration scuttled the noble effort at creating a world-class museum in the city.” He was, however, optimistic that the state government will be willing to work with the palace of the Oba of Benin to create the new Benin Royal Museum, which is in the formative stages.

Jess Castellote, the Director of the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art at Pan Atlantic University in Lagos, thinks too much noise is being made about repatriation from outside of the country. He believes that “the growing consciousness about museums within Nigeria should be nourished and encouraged to grow.” He identified areas where his museum needs help, including with collaborations with Western museums on exhibitions and training in the more scientific aspect of conservation. Museums on the African continent also need funding to create programs of mutual benefit, such as joint exhibitions and exchange of personnel. Without such investments, Castellote believes, the apathy with which people have perceived museums in Nigeria will continue.

A cross-section of scholars from various academic institutions across the length and breadth of the state, as well as local chiefs and important dignitaries, hold diverging views of Benin art based on their different social and religious beliefs. While some scholars think that these objects need to be repatriated to compensate for the injustices of the past, others do not think it is necessary as the objects will not be appreciated much upon their return. Others believe that such objects have “demonic” connotations that will not bode well for the progress of the city and country at large. Their thinking is hinged on the Abrahamic religious doctrine that considers cultural practices a fetish.

Some traditional chiefs hold similarly negative views of the repatriation conversation. Chief Osemwegie Ebbohon decried what he referred to as the trust issues between the people and government of Nigeria in the repatriation conversation. He was skeptical about who should be financially compensated when monetary decisions are made related to the returning art, stressing the distrust that was rife among the people in Benin. This skepticism may have led to the federal government’s decision to give the objects to the Oba of Benin, the traditional arm of government that sits at the lowest rung of the government hierarchy, as opposed to a state government.

There was also the squabble that led to the Oba denouncing the Legacy Restoration Trust, an independent nonprofit created to raise funds for the creation of EMOWAA. When the trust started raising in funds from international donors, the Oba became incensed about the makeup of the group. This led him to publicly declare that funds should be paid to his palace rather than the trust. He also denounced the proposed name for the museum and instead sought to name it the Benin Royal Museum.

These intrigues have led to a kind of apathy within international circles about repatriation activities. A BBC article on May 10, 2023, “Nigeria Benin Bronzes: Buhari Declaration Blindsides Museum Officials,” discussed the developments in Nigeria, indicating that some European cultural institutions have begun to question their decisions on repatriation. If the trend continues, the gains that have been made since Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 declaration that France will repatriate African art will wither away, especially regarding Benin art.

Political tension among various government entities and leaders is diminishing the belief that Nigeria can create a world-class museum to care for repatriated Benin objects and motivate the public to appreciate the artistic achievements of the Benin artists. The national government and Benin City must now work together on plans to receive and put the repatriated art works to uses that will benefit their citizens and the world at large.

Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba, Ph.D., is the Curator of African Arts at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. Reach him at ndy.ezeluomba@vmfa.museum.
Now with new features and peer communities, Museum Junction makes it easy for you to explore topics and discuss what matters most to you. Check out the growing list of peer communities, and a few ways to get started!

- Audience Research and Evaluation
- CEOs & Directors
- Collections Stewardship
- DEAI Leaders
- Digital Content & Technology
- Education & Interpretation
- Finance, Accounting, and Audit
- Historic Houses and Sites
- Independent Museum Professionals
- LGBTQ+ Community

» Log in and bookmark the member homepage, and explore your personalized feed.

» Connect with peers on any topic in the Open Forum, or dive deeper into one of the peer communities.

» Adjust your digest frequency to get the updates you want, when you want.

Learn more about new member benefits and updates as part of our $1 million investment in the museum community: bit.ly/museum-community-investment
The Yaqui Case

In 2022, the National Museums of World Culture in Sweden returned ceremonial items to the Indigenous Yaquis in Mexico.

By Adriana Muñoz
In a ceremony held on June 3, 2022, Sweden, facilitated by the National Museums of World Culture, returned a collection of 24 ceremonial artifacts to the Indigenous Yaqui people from the Mexican state of Sonora. This marked the culmination of a challenging cross-continent journey spanning almost two decades and involving the collaborative efforts of several stakeholders, including the Yaqui people in Mexico, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe in Arizona, and the Swedish museum. The unfolding saga of negotiations and revelations encompassed both emotionally impactful and enlightening moments.

Having been the Latin American Curator for Collections and Research at the National Museums of World Culture—referred to as Statens museer för Världskultur/världskulturmuseerna (SMVK) in Swedish—I was deeply immersed in this historic restitution process and had an intimate connection with this remarkable narrative. SMVK was created in 1996 to administer the country’s collections from outside Europe and includes the Museum of Ethnography, the Mediterranean Museum, the Museum of East Asia in Stockholm, and the Museum of World Culture in Göteborg.

But what is the correct way to tell this story of restitution? From which point of view should it be told? It is probably most correct to start with the creation of the museums that kept the spoliation from colonial and neocolonial times as their so-called ethnographic collections. But that would make this recounting much too long. However, it is also important to remember the history of the countries where such collections originated, which is of particular importance in this case.

I am going to try to keep myself to the facts of this restitution.

From Mexico to Sweden

European museums are currently grappling with the complexities of requests for restitution and repatriation, often from groups and individuals who were historically silenced and marginalized. Protocols and guidelines, based on international standards largely shaped by economically and politically powerful nations, often disadvantage Indigenous communities.

This case began with a single sacred object—the Maaso Kova—a revered deer head integral to the Yaqui people’s ceremonial dances that acts as a bridge between the physical world and the spiritual realm of their ancestors.

The collection at SMVK had its roots with the Yaqui people, who were forcibly relocated by the Mexican government in the early 20th century from their original land in Sonora to Tlaxcala, around 1,200 miles to the south. During their confinement in Tlaxcala, the Yaquis persevered in honoring their traditions, beliefs, and cultural heritage, even integrating symbols from their unfamiliar surroundings into new ceremonial objects. For example, the collection includes a Maaso Kova not made from a deer and the use of a flower that was not present in their culture before the deportation but is still popular with Yaquis today. These artifacts form the cornerstone of SMVK’s collection.

The artifacts found their way to Sweden through an unexpected connection, forged by the friendship between the deported Yaquis and two Danish women, Helga Larsen and Bodil Christensen. Today, we can acknowledge that there were inherently imbalanced power dynamics within this relationship between two white, European women and a group of dispossessed Indigenous people; however, the extensive correspondence between the sisters and the Yaquis suggests a genuinely friendly alliance. The Yaquis gifted the sisters many of the objects and sold them others.

The collection arrived in Sweden during the mid-1930s and was housed at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, a part of SMVK, until the early 21st
century. In 2004, the Maaso Kova from the collection was exhibited as part of “den skapande männiksa” (“The Creative Man”). After viewing the exhibition, Andrea Carmen, a representative of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), first requested the return of the sacred Maaso Kova. IITC is an organization of Indigenous peoples from the Americas, the Caribbean, and the Pacific that works to protect Indigenous rights, treaties, traditional cultures, and sacred lands. However, this request was not documented in the SMVK archives until 2014, when the Pascua Yaqui Tribe in Arizona, collaborating with the IITC, also demanded its return.
Clockwise from top: The Matachines dance at the repatriation ceremony in Mexico; Teodoro Bulitmea Flores examining a drum used in the Pascola dance; and a child at the repatriation ceremony.
Following research into the Yaqui items in the collection, the Museum of Ethnography concluded that there was no basis to return the mask to the Yaqui in Arizona. Among the key reasons cited by the museum were that the collection was a gift from the exiled Yaquis in Tlaxcala and that the objects hailed from Mexico, not the United States.

The Restitution Process
The Yaquis’ pursuit of restitution did not end when the museum initially declined to return the Maaso Kova to Arizona. The IITC, in partnership with the Pascua Tribe in Arizona, persisted in their claim for the Maaso Kova. In 2015, SMVK chose to involve Mexico and the Yaquis from Rio Yaqui in Sonora, Mexico, in the case. Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), acting as the intermediary between SMVK and the Yaqui people, appointed Dr. Raquel Padilla Ramos as its interlocutor. Dr. Padilla Ramos, an expert in Yaqui history and a Yaqui rights activist, was embraced by the Yaquis of the Ocho Pueblos, which is the group’s governing body.

In 2017, a delegation of Yaquis from Sonora, Mexico, traveled to Sweden to study the objects. They concluded that it would be sacrilegious to separate the Maaso Kova from the other objects in the Yaquis’ collection. The entire collection, rather than just the Maaso Kova, should be restored to the Yaqui people. Subsequently, SMVK began to contemplate the possibility of returning the entire collection to the Rio Yaqui in Mexico.

Though the initial request for repatriation originated from the descendant community in the United States, the source community for the objects was in Mexico. While the Yaquis from Pascua in Arizona believed that their Yaqui identity took precedence over their current country of residence, SMVK, like most Western museums, focuses on tracing the provenance of objects, making origin important.

Adding further complexity, the Ocho Pueblos in Sonora, Mexico, hold the authority to decide Yaqui cultural matters, and the Pascua tribe is not one of the Ocho Pueblos. During this process, one of the Pueblos, Loma de Bacum, communicated to SMVK that its members wished for the objects to remain in Sweden. Their rationale was that their ancestors had offered these items as a gift, and they wished to honor that legacy. However, this argument was not accepted by the IITC or the Yaquis from Pascua.

The two Yaqui groups also had different institutional allies. The Pascua tribe in Arizona sought assistance from the United Nations and Mexico’s National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI). The leaders of Ocho Pueblos in Sonora collaborated with INAH. Some Yaqui activists in Sonora, still striving for basic rights in their homeland, were wary of the INPI.

Upon the artifacts’ return on June 3, 2022, at the Mexican Embassy in Stockholm, only those affiliated with the Arizona/INPI group were present to receive the objects. The Yaquis from Sonora, who had been involved in studying the collection, were notably absent from the ceremony, highlighting possible ongoing disagreements between the two groups.

Ultimately, on July 14, 2023, in a ceremony in Vicam, a town in Sonora, Mexico, the boxes from Sweden were unveiled in front of the leaders of the Ocho Pueblos. After inspecting the items, the objects were resealed in the boxes, awaiting the Yaquis’ decision regarding their future home and purpose.

Once the collection was repatriated, SMVK’s involvement in the process ceased. Nonetheless, lingering questions remain. Could the process have been improved? Should the rules of engagement have been revised? Did the Danish sisters ultimately exploit the vulnerable political circumstances of the Yaqui? Are the source or descendant communities the rightful owners?

While definitive answers are elusive, restitution offers a glimmer of hope—a chance for the Yaqui communities to recontextualize their past through the prism of these artifacts. Restitution also offers a process for museums to reconsider their practices, fostering a more just and inclusive future.

Adriana Muñoz, Ph.D., is the Latin American Curator for Collections and Research at Världskulturmuseerna, the National Museums of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden, and is a judge of the European Museum of the Year Award.
The Denver Museum of Nature & Science is committed to voluntary returns when morally, ethically, or commonsensically justified.

Four months earlier, on November 16, 1990, US President George H.W. Bush had signed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) into law. NAGPRA created a formal, legal mechanism by which federally recognized Tribal Nations and lineal descendants could request the return of ancestors (i.e., human remains), their belongings (i.e., funerary objects), sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (i.e., objects owned by a community, not an individual) from universities, museums, and repositories that accept federal funding.

Since that first voluntary return of sacred objects in 1991, DMNS staff have continued to make voluntary returns when moral, ethical, or commonsensical justifications warrant, seeking to move beyond the relatively low bar set by NAGPRA. Two examples—the voluntary reburial of non-Native American human remains in Crestone, Colorado, and the voluntary return of 30 vigango to the Mijikenda tribes of coastal Kenya—provide insight into the historical, philosophical, and ethical contexts for such returns by the museum.
The Repatriation Initiative

In the summer of 2007, DMNS crafted an aspiration statement: “We seek to curate the best understood and most ethically held anthropology collection in North America.” To be the “best understood” meant that we would seek to fill all gaps in our knowledge about the collection—we would address cataloguing backlogs; we would create, maintain, and enhance electronic databases; and we would deliberately work with source and descendant communities to make sure that our knowledge of the collection is culturally accurate and appropriate.

To be the “most ethically held” anthropology collection meant that we would go beyond the specific letter of laws affecting collections; we wanted to proceed with the spirit of those laws firmly in mind. In April 2008, the museum’s board of trustees codified that institutional commitment by formally stating in the Collection Policy that the museum would comply with both the spirit and letter of NAGPRA. That policy also recognized, in writing, that many tribes, communities, and countries might want certain items returned even if there are no formal laws requiring repatriation. In those cases, the Collection Policy recommended that the museum enter “into equal and open communication with the communities that connect themselves to the objects in the Museum’s custody.”

Penning an aspiration statement and getting a policy approved were one thing; doing the work of repatriations and returns was another. Thus, we began a series of projects and programs under the rubric of The Repatriation Initiative to address ethical issues with the collections. The initiative incorporated anthropological understandings of sacred and inalienable property, ethical values surrounding the dead, collaborative methodologies, and notions of restorative justice that allowed us to proactively grapple with the tangled history of DMNS collections.

As we began this work, we came to see repatriations and voluntary returns as a form of social justice necessary for reconciliation between source and descendant communities and museums. In other words, we believe that the museum cannot have a meaningful and productive future with Native American tribes, in particular, until it has resolved its past.

The Crestone Reburial

As we were developing The Repatriation Initiative, we made a conscious decision to no longer curate human remains without informed consent. That decision set in motion a systematic, multiyear process through NAGPRA to repatriate and rebury Native American ancestors. But NAGPRA applies only to human remains that can be identified by archaeological, biological, or other evidence as Native American. What
about non–Native American human remains in the collections? It quickly became clear that our informed-consen
t decision must also apply to non–Native American human remains.

In the fall of 2014, we hosted a daylong interfaith dialogue. DMNS curators and collections staff, all of whom were trained as archaeologists, welcomed Catholic and Unitarian ministers, Buddhist and Hindu practitioners, professors of anatomy and religious studies, and a Cherokee tribal member into dialogue to deter-
mine what to do with the non-Native American human remains in our care. (We invited a Jewish rabbi and a Muslim imam to participate; both canceled at the last minute due to scheduling conflicts.)

At the end of a long day, we collectively agreed to rebury the non-Native human remains in a nondenomi-
national ceremony in a natural (no boxes, chemicals, or headstones) cemetery in Crestone, Colorado. That reburial occurred on October 14, 2015.

From a strictly scientific perspective, the loss to science of this voluntary reburial is minimal. There was almost no data associated with these human remains, which represented a minimum of 20 individuals. We barely knew where, when, or how their bones were recovered. From a precedent perspective, we believed that it was time for a major natural history museum to properly care for these people, who never gave permission for their remains to be curated in perpetuity. In this instance, proper care meant giving them a proper burial.

The Vigango Affair
Another example of The Repatriation Initiative in action is the museum’s return of vigango to the Mijikenda in Kenya. In the late 1980s and 1990s, unsuspecting museums across the country unwittingly began to curate people’s souls. These souls came in the form of vigango (singular: kikango), which are wooden funerary posts.

The Mijikenda, literally meaning the nine tribes, have traditional home-
lands along the coast of Kenya, from Mombasa in the south to just over the border and into Somalia in the north. Two of those nine Mijikenda groups,
Mijikenda elders Hilary Mwachuma (at left) and Mwangiri Mwanza pose with vigango in their appropriate cultural context in a sacred forest in southeastern Kenya in September 2021. The exact location will not be named in order to protect the vigango.

The Giriama and Kauma, honor deceased relatives who were members of the honorific Gohu society by carving often exquisite, anthropomorphic posts in termite-resistant hardwood. The Mijikenda believe that each kikango embodies the soul of the person for whom it was carved.

Once carved, vigango are erected in local homesteads and in communal, sacred forests; once erected they are meant to decay in place and are not to be disturbed. If they fall over during that decaying process, they are not to be moved. If moved, the groups believe that all manner of spiritual, physical, and economic harm may come to the community.

Unfortunately, in the 1970s through the 1990s, vigango became increasingly attractive to African art dealers and markets in the United States. Vigango were stolen, or purchased under duress, in order to supply that market. In 1990, DMNS accepted 30 vigango donated by a well-known actor and a well-known producer in Hollywood; neither of them had a prior relationship with the DMNS. The vigango were shipped directly from an art gallery in Los Angeles. As far as we can tell, neither donor ever took possession of the vigango, but both took significant tax deductions as a result of their donations. The art gallery made a hefty profit. The Mijikenda, honored members of the Gohu society, and their family members all suffered harm as a result.

In 2009, we recognized that DMNS should not be in the business of curating people’s souls. We therefore started working, slowly but surely, to figure out how to return vigango to the Mijikenda. Over the next decade we made slow progress, but we desperately needed a breakthrough. It finally came in 2018.

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science’s Repatriation Initiative incorporates the following as its guiding principles:

- **Respect**: Honoring people and their things while showing deep consideration for their personal autonomy and collective welfare.

- **Reciprocity**: Creating relationships based on parity and the cooperative exchange of ideas and things.

- **Dialogue**: Committing to open, democratic, and sustained conversation.

- **Justice**: Repairing past wrongs and treating all people fairly.

REPATRIATION PRINCIPLES

Photo by Stephen E. Nash
That year, I attended the Getty Leadership Institute at Claremont Graduate College in Southern California, and one of my classmates was Dr. Purity Kiura, then Director of Sites, Monuments, and Antiquities for the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). We agreed to work on this important project, and in July 2019, 30 vigango from DMNS arrived at the Fort Jesus Museum in Mombasa, Kenya. NMK is now holding the vigango in trust for the Mijikenda, who hope to build a cultural heritage center closer to their homelands where the vigango can be re-erected and returned to their appropriate cultural context.

Happily, there has been a cascading effect from this repatriation. In July 2023, 37 vigango from the Illinois State Museum and 16 from the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields were shipped to Mombasa as well. We believe more vigango, and therefore Mijikenda ancestors, will be returned to Kenya in the near future.

Once we decided to act, the process for each of these voluntary returns was relatively straightforward, if time consuming. Some of our museum-based colleagues expressed concerns about setting legal precedents, but we turned that concern on its head—what is wrong with setting a precedent by doing the right thing?

As a scientist, I understand that we can, and do, learn wonderful things from the study of human remains. As a museum professional, I understand that museums have done egregious harm to Indigenous communities around the world. As a humanist, I am thrilled to engage in work that is reshaping museum collections with an eye toward new reciprocal relationships with people all over the world.

Stephen E. Nash is Senior Curator of Archaeology and Director of Anthropology and the Avenir Conservation Center at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science in Colorado. Reach him at snash@dmns.org.

Definition of Terms

**Voluntary repatriation**
The return of cultural artifacts, material from nature, human remains, and/or associated data and documentation to individuals and groups representing the culture or country of origin, or to former owners or heirs, when such acts of return are not mandated by law, regulations, or international agreements. The term most commonly refers to returns made to a government entity, rather than a family or individuals.

**Restitution**
1) The return of cultural artifacts to individuals or heirs of the original owners, as opposed to communities, groups, or countries.

2) Acts taken to restore the situation which existed before a wrongful act was committed. For example, restitution might take the form of restoration of rights, livelihood, land ownership, citizenship, legal standing, or wealth.

**Reparations**
Compensation for wrongs that cannot be reversed through restitution. This may include direct financial compensation for the cumulative historical effects of damage to a community overall, including to mental and physical health, capital, education, property, and cultural heritage. Reparative practice may also include actions that acknowledge and address harms, and actions or policies that redress systemic economic, educational, or social disadvantages.
The Art of Restitution

Museums need to go beyond the letter of the law and uphold a high ethical standard in building and maintaining our collections.

By Victoria Reed
Promised gift of Susan and Matthew Weatherbie, in support of the Center for Netherlandish Art, May 12, 2023; photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Victoria Reed, Sadler Senior Curator for Provenance, and Rhona MacBeth, Director of Conservation and Scientific Research and the Eijk and Rose-Marie van Otterloo Conservator of Paintings, examine a painting for historical marks and labels after it is unpacked at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
“When faced with a restitution claim, museums should not necessarily expect a ‘smoking gun’ showing precisely when and how a work of art was taken in order to assess the claim fairly.”

It seems like art restitution is in the news now more than ever. Every day, stories emerge about museums removing works of art from their collections and returning them to previous owners or source communities. But Nazi plunder is not the same as archaeological looting, neither of which is comparable to conversations happening around colonialism or the Parthenon Marbles.

Seeing art restitution as a monolithic category—as press accounts often do—inevitably blurs lines between very different issues. Not all museum returns are the same, but what are the differences, and what do they have in common?

In thinking about why museums restitute art in the first place, we need to consider what a museum is. We are institutions that collect and preserve works of art, of course, but we are more than that. We are, largely, educational and nonprofit; we are supported by the generosity of our donors; and, most important, we serve the public. In fact, you often hear that we hold our collections in the public trust. Taking a broad view, we restitute because displaying stolen art is not in the interest of the public trust.

At the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), our collections policy—the document that dictates how we handle all collection-related matters—states that we will not collect anything known to have been stolen or illegally appropriated unless the object was subsequently returned, or the theft has otherwise been redressed. That sounds obvious. A basic tenet of American law is that a thief cannot convey good title and, like everyone else, museums must obey the law.

To date, the return of illicit artifacts from American museums has been rooted in legal precedent rather than purely ethical principles. For example, art looted during World War II was never legal to buy and sell in the US, and the legislation in many archaeologically rich countries has determined whether objects from their soil may be legally exported and sold here. When we return Nazi-plundered art or recently looted antiquities, we acknowledge those legal frameworks.

But the law is the minimum standard to which we must adhere. As public, educational institutions, it is reasonable to expect museums to go beyond the letter of the law and uphold a high ethical standard in building and maintaining our collections. Unlike the law, however, which is relatively fixed, ethical considerations on collecting are constantly evolving.

Five Theft Categories
In this landscape, how do we define “stolen”—in other words, how do we identify an object in our collection that is suitable for restitution? This is where provenance becomes important. We must look at the history of possession and movement of an object from the time of its creation to the present and construct a life history for it. Then we look for breaks in that chain of ownership, which can indicate thefts, forcible sales, and other transfers without the knowing consent of the owner.

The problem, however, is that thieves rarely leave a paper trail. When faced with a restitution claim,
museums should not necessarily expect a "smoking gun" showing precisely when and how a work of art was taken in order to assess the claim fairly. Not every question may be answerable. Decisions about restitution must be based on a solid foundation of research, but they also call for small leaps of faith. We must be comfortable taking those leaps if we are to act ethically rather than strictly legally.

Over the past 25 years, the MFA has deaccessioned and returned, or otherwise reached financial settlements to retain, works of art that were lost to previous owners in several different ways. What these objects...
have in common is that they can be broadly defined as stolen. There are differences, however, and the losses can be grouped into five general categories.

The first can be called garden-variety theft. Works of art stolen from private homes or other cultural institutions obviously cannot stay in our collection. Unfortunately, not every theft is reported to law enforcement or documented reliably. In returning stolen objects, we have had to consider the probability of a theft under the given circumstances. Sometimes there is an indication that the owner (e.g., a university collection) accounted for a work of art at a particular date, but after a certain point it could not be located—with no plausible explanation for its disappearance other than a theft.

Archaeological looting—the illicit excavation of antiquities from burial sites—is a second category. Many countries have passed laws that vest the ownership of their archaeological heritage with the government, and in recognition of these laws, the MFA has in recent years returned antiquities to Italy, Turkey, Nigeria, and Mali.

What makes archaeological looting tricky to determine, however, is that nobody knows what is in the ground before it is dug up, so there is no way to report what has gone missing. When faced with a claim for archaeological materials, museums have to look at the likelihood that an antiquity was looted during a particular timespan. Was it deliberately mis-declared at an international border? Is its ownership history fanciful, perhaps too good to be true, and still not verifiable? Is it stylistically consistent with other objects known to come from a looted site? These red flags still may not constitute enough circumstantial evidence to make a determination about ownership, but they should be taken into consideration.

A third category is wartime pillage. The Hague Convention of 1907 sought to protect artwork and prohibit pillage during war, and its provisions were greatly expanded over the course of the 20th century. The MFA has returned works of art taken during World War I and World War II. But how far back are we willing to go?

Many museums are starting to consider the return of artwork taken in conflicts that pre-date the 20th century, like the so-called Benin Bronzes, which were plundered by English soldiers in what is now Nigeria in 1897. If we return 19th century war loot, we might ask, aren’t we just applying today’s standards to events of the past? Not necessarily. France repatriated looted

WHEN NOT TO RESTITUTE

When it comes to decisions about restitution, ownership is generally determined by several factors: Is the claimed object identical to the museum’s object? Is the museum communicating with all the rightful claimants? And does the history of possession and movement indicate theft or involuntary transfer?

Conversely, museums are wise not to make restitution decisions based on the following factors:

- an object’s financial value (“This is so valuable, we must deny the claim.”)
- its importance to the collection (“We’re never going to show it, so let’s give it back.”)
- its desirability to others (“It was legally sold but would take pride of place in this small town.”)
- a subjective opinion about the claimant (“They won’t value it like we do.”)

Every decision sets an internal precedent. If we rely on such criteria in one instance, nothing is to stop us from relying upon them again in the future—at which point we risk breaking up our collections subjectively and haphazardly.
artwork after the Napoleonic Wars (1815), setting a new standard for European nations in conflict.

However, the norms were upheld unevenly, and usually along cultural and racial lines. From the battlegrounds of Asia and Africa, European soldiers continued to bring home textiles, luxury goods, and other works of art. It is thus not unreasonable for museums today to seek to correct that imbalance by resolving claims for 19th century war loot.

**State expropriation**, or the taking of private property by a government, is a fourth category, the most familiar example of which is Nazi-looted art. Many museums have works of art that were stolen from Jewish collectors and nationalized by National Socialist Germany, only to be recovered and restituted by Allied forces after the end of World War II. Because of the copious documentation that survives, these cases tend to be relatively easy to identify and straightforward to research.

The fifth and most expansive category is that of **sales under duress or other forcible transfers**. Forced sales happened frequently under the Nazi regime. Jewish collectors often had to sell their art to pay discriminatory fines and taxes or to finance their fight to safety. Even absent the direct involvement of the Nazis, many collectors had to abandon or sell their belongings when they had no other means of subsistence. Sometimes they received proceeds, other times they received a fraction of what they were owed, or could only access funds through tightly controlled bank accounts.

Duress transactions are not limited to the Holocaust. Brutal periods of colonization—particularly in Africa and Asia—led to communities being stripped of their tangible heritage throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Indigenous burial goods, sacred objects, and other items of cultural patrimony were forcibly removed from tribal land as the result of settler colonialism in North America. NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) provides a framework for repatriation claims for American museums, although it does not extend to claims from Indigenous peoples outside the United States.

It is this final category that most urgently calls upon museums to act ethically, rather than strictly legally, in assessing ownership claims. We must look beyond the provenance of the work of art to consider the full set of circumstances in which it changed hands. And even after exhaustive research, questions are likely to remain. The MFA has reached a number of settlements for works of art that were lost or forcibly sold during the Holocaust. In those cases, when faced with an incomplete paper trail and lingering questions, we had to consider the probability of coercion given the historical context. How likely was it that money was received? How much agency would an owner have had in parting with this property at the time?

**Consistency Is Key**

Whatever the type of claim, when coming to a decision about ownership, museums must be consistent in their reasoning. We must determine whether it's reasonable to conclude, given the available information, that the object has been taken, lost, or involuntarily given and not subsequently returned. If the answer is no, then it is not an appropriate candidate for restitution, and we should share our research and thought process with the claimants. If the answer is yes, then we must be prepared to acknowledge that the object does not rightfully belong to us and seek a resolution with the rightful owners.

Resolving ownership disputes does not always have to entail a physical return. A full or partial financial settlement, long-term loan, or shared stewardship agreement are just a few ways to acknowledge and repair broken chains of ownership. The important thing is that the loss is redressed in some way, and the resolution is the result of an open dialogue between the museum and the claimant.

Being willing to enter into these conversations and being fully transparent about our actions are undoubtedly the best ways for museums to be accountable to our many audiences—and uphold the public trust—in the 21st century.

---

**Victoria Reed** is the Sadler Senior Curator for Provenance at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Reach her at vreed@mfa.org or on X (formerly Twitter) at @Victoria_S_Reed.
BEYOND COMPLIANCE

At the McClung Museum, a NAGPRA assessment strengthens collaboration with Native Nations on a current and future exhibition.

By Cat Shteynberg, Claudio Gómez, and Sadie Counts
The updated entrance to the McClung Museum’s “The Repatriation of ... Archaeology and the Native Peoples of Tennessee exhibition space. It won gold for exhibitions under $10,000 at the Southeastern Museum Conference this year.
Didactics with this, and similar, language appear throughout the updated exhibition.

Since the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, museums have struggled to come to terms with the law, which requires that any institution receiving federal funding provide Federally Recognized Tribes with an inventory of all Native American Ancestral Remains and associated funerary objects (Belongings), along with summaries of sacred and patrimonial items connected to Tribal identity, for possible Repatriation.

In the 30 years since NAGPRA’s passage, museums have been slow to Repatriate Ancestors and Belongings to Native Nations, to redress imbalances of power in the museum sphere, and to collaborate constructively with Indigenous groups regarding the interpretation and care of their material culture. Over the past few years, pressure from Native Nations, museum employees, and media coverage of Repatriation have begun to move the needle.

The McClung Museum at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) has also struggled to implement both NAGPRA and voluntary Repatriation effectively. The McClung Museum was partially founded to serve as a repository for millions of archaeological items excavated in the 1930s by UT in partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Until recently, a Euro-American archaeological narrative has dominated our space, and, too often, the museum made decisions about what parts of collections fell under NAGPRA rather than ceding this authority to Indigenous communities.

Over the past four years, the McClung Museum has taken steps to make all Belongings available for return, educate our visitors on NAGPRA, and rework our exhibition on Native Nations with ties to Tennessee. All of this work is being done in partnership with Native Nation collaborators.

Assessing the Collection
In 2019, the museum conducted a NAGPRA assessment of all remaining archaeological objects on display, creating an inventory for each display case along with corresponding photographs. This posed a challenge because the museum’s primary exhibition showcasing material culture from an archaeological...
TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NATIVE NATIONS

Following are some of the lessons we’ve learned in working with Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and collaborating with Native Nations.

**Working with THPOs**

THPOs typically deal with Repatriation and NAGPRA on behalf of Native Nations. Museums’ first point of contact when dealing with NAGPRA and Repatriation should be through this official channel. THPOs may also choose to include museum/interpretation/cultural experts from their Nation in collaboration with your museum, but it is important for museums to understand and respect the official political structure of Nations and their offices.

Compensating editors, writers, and cultural experts for their time and expertise is crucial. However, some THPOs may not be allowed to take monetary payment since this type of work is sometimes considered “part of their job.” In these cases, museums should determine another form of compensation for collaborators’ work.

THPOs and other Native Nation officials are often underpaid, under-resourced, and very busy. While working with independent Native artists, curators, or other experts under contract may enable shorter timelines, a 90-day review period is typical for THPOs. Plan accordingly.

**Collaborating with Native Nations**

Consider an editorial or language guide for your exhibition and when communicating to and about Native Nations. Language is powerful—remember that capitalization (e.g., of Native, Indigenous, Repatriation, and Ancestors) is a form of respect and acknowledgment. Some language regarding “ownership” and settler concepts of commodification and law will be problematic and will require careful editing.

Official NAGPRA legal consultation is different from collaborative work on an exhibition. Clarify in writing the expectations for collaborators, including schedules and due dates, compensation, and what framework will be used for a project. Invite collaborators to give feedback from the beginning of the project, including on the project’s framework.

Ask collaborators what goal they or their community has for a specific project and work together to set the rules for engagement. We suggest using the Core Tenets of Indigenous Methodologies developed by curator and scholar Heather Ahtone (Chickasaw Nation) as a starting point:

- **Respect** (for knowledge, for people);
- **Reciprocity** (bringing the best of ourselves to work toward a common goal);
- **Relationships** (mutually beneficial, shared authority); and
- **Responsibility** (related to goals set by team, budget, and schedules).

Finally, keep in mind that perfect is the enemy of good. Too often museums don’t begin this type of work because they are afraid of failing or not getting everything perfect. This fear is one of the main obstacles to decolonizing museums.

context, “Archaeology and the Native Peoples of Tennessee,” was installed around 2001, and some items only had limited documentation.

In August 2021, UT Director of Repatriation Dr. Ellen Lofaro invited 21 Tribes associated with the state of Tennessee to a meeting to discuss the museum’s NAGPRA assessment of its exhibitions. Eight Tribes agreed to participate, two deferred, and the remaining did not reply. The official virtual consultation meeting was held in December 2021 with representatives of each participating Native Nation.

While a portion of Belongings were removed from display in 2018 as part of a formal Repatriation process, the representatives in attendance expressed their concern that all Belongings had not been removed at that time. Many Native Nations’ representatives also expressed frustration at being left out of earlier exhibitions or display consultations and meetings.
Immediately after this 2021 consultation, the museum’s leadership team, curatorial staff, and collections staff made plans to voluntarily remove the remaining 142 known Belongings as well as 164 items with limited provenance. We also chose to cover up interpretation that was offensive to our Native Nation collaborators: for example, a photograph of an archaeological excavation of a burial mound; a line drawing of Ancestral Remains; and a dog burial made with a facsimile, which nevertheless suggested an original burial.

From January to March of 2022, over 300 items were carefully removed from view. That spring, the museum also recalled all its archaeology loans for NAGPRA reassessment. Some loans had been out for more than 30 years and included Belongings.

NAGPRA Education

It was immediately clear that we had two choices for the former “Archaeology and Native Peoples of Tennessee” gallery, now without around 25 percent of the items formerly on display. The museum could close the gallery and, from the visitor’s perspective, ignore the massive changes happening within our walls. Or we could highlight these changes in a display on NAGPRA until we were able to install a new and appropriate exhibition on Native culture in consultation with those communities. The impulse toward transparency was immediate and strong.

Taking cues from Steven Lubar’s 2018 Medium post “Exhibiting Absence,” we wanted to use the new emptiness of much of the exhibition as way to explain NAGPRA in an impactful way. We realized that it was in fact the emptiness that lent itself to a visual and literal representation of Repatriation. The absence in our gallery highlights previous and outmoded conventions that we used in our space, such as an emphasis on chronological time based on archaeological timescales, lack of representations of contemporary Native Peoples, and an omniscient scholarly curatorial voice.

We knew that many of our visitors wouldn’t be familiar with the law, so the first step was to define NAGPRA. However, we wanted to go further by also talking about sovereignty, NAGPRA as a human rights issue, our role as stewards, our commitment to collaboration and not just compliance, moving beyond NAGPRA, and, perhaps most importantly, visibly centering Native voices by highlighting the significance of NAGPRA to them. Once we had this framework, the text for the exhibit-within-an-exhibit came together relatively quickly.

We called the new exhibit an “intervention,” because while we deinstalled and removed over 300 items, the only added elements were new interpretation explaining why items had been removed and why it had been inappropriate for them to be on view in the first place. New panels, overlays, and didactics were added to the space in a simple yet powerful black-and-white color scheme that distinguished them from the earth tones of the former exhibition. These called attention to the empty case work, asked open-ended questions for visitors to reflect on, and
attempted to preemptively answer questions that visitors may have during their time in the exhibition. Most impactfully, we added massive panels on accent walls with quotes from Native Nation partners to prominently center their voices in the space.

While we knew non-Native visitors would have questions about “ownership” and what happens to Repatriated items, we attempted to address some of these questions while leaving out sensitive information not appropriate for public consumption. Our Native Nation collaborators pointed out language we had used that was harmful or incorrect. For example, they emphasized the capitalization of terms such as “Repatriation,” “Tribe,” “Nation,” and “Ancestor” to reiterate their importance and not referring to Belongings as “objects” or “artifacts” to formalize that they are inappropriate components of museum collections.

We have posted photos of this interim exhibition and its text on our website so that it may guide or inspire others as they deal with these challenging issues. Since opening the exhibition, we have given tours and had important conversations with representatives from the Tennessee Division of Archaeology and the state archaeology offices as well as Tennessee State Parks and the TVA (which also generously contributed monetary support for the exhibition).

Moving Forward
Thousands of Ancestral Remains and material culture items are held or legally controlled by the museum, which serves as a repository for hundreds of archaeological sites investigated by TVA, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and others. Currently, the museum is working on Repatriation claims for these Ancestors, Belongings, and additional items subject to NAGPRA in partnership with UT’s Office of Repatriation, the TVA, and USACE.

Nevertheless, the museum’s goal is to move beyond NAGPRA to address the broader ethical treatment of Indigenous objects, designs, images, and sensitive topics on display or housed at the museum. This exhibition has given us the opportunity to reexamine our commitment to our Native Nation community partners and move forward in a way that goes above and beyond what NAGPRA legally requires.

The final phase of changes to the McClung Museum’s “Archaeology and Native Peoples of Tennessee” gallery will be to deinstall the space starting in 2024 to prepare for a new exhibition tentatively titled “A Sense of Indigenous Place.” The exhibition, which will feature contemporary works by Native artists, is co-curated by representatives from four Native Nations and centers their interpretation of Indigenous relationships to mounds and their continuity as sacred spaces. Placing the exhibition in the McClung Museum’s largest, centerpiece gallery makes a clear statement about our commitment to including Indigenous voices in our exhibitions.

NAGPRA has asked museums, anthropologists, and archaeologists to fundamentally reconsider our purposes and practices. We subscribe to what Ben Garcia wrote in a 2019 *Museum* article on decolonization: our museum “no longer view[s] the process of obtaining consent for holding Indigenous belongings as a task to check off our ‘to-do’ list. Rather, it is our work moving forward” [emphasis ours].

We now understand that our work as museum professionals is to connect to the communities that we purport to represent—and we are empowered by that realization. Embracing this work presents new opportunities for museums and museum practitioners, as we consider how to develop meaningful relationships and infuse our work with compassion and humanity.
We are excited to announce that AAM has made major improvements to our online community, Museum Junction. Enhancements include a robust member homepage complete with a customizable feed and new community engagement features. Since the upgrade, AAM has welcomed 7,000 new community members. Daily engagement in the community has dramatically increased, and new community groups are being added every month. A few of our most recently added communities include Historic Houses & Sites; LGBTQ+; and Finance, Accounting, & Audit. Join the conversation on Museum Junction today! Find us at community.aam-us.org.

In a High-Stakes Year, Will You Make Your Voice Heard?
Stakes will be high this coming election year, and we must continue to share our data and stories with Congress. For more than 15 years, Museums Advocacy Day has been providing the essential training and support advocates need to...
“Peer Review is a great opportunity whether you are a mid-career professional, have been in the field for many years, or have recently retired.”

effectively make the case for museums. We hope to see you at Museums Advocacy Day 2024, Feb. 26–27 in Washington, DC.

Learn more today in the Museums Advocacy Day section (under Events) of the AAM website: aam-us.org/programs/museums-advocacy-day.

Professional Development Through AAM Peer Review

Did you know that AAM offers no-cost professional development through the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) and Accreditation? Peer Review is a great opportunity whether you are a mid-career professional, have been in the field for many years, or have recently retired. AAM’s Peer Reviewers evaluate museum self-assessment materials, conduct site visits, and write reports based on their findings. With each site visit, Peer Reviewers interact with fellow professionals and learn how another museum addresses its challenges and community.

Would you like to …

• Give back to the museum field?
• Get no-cost professional development?
• Learn from other museums?
• Travel and expand your network?

Are you someone who is …

• Strongly committed to nurturing institutional excellence?
• Knowledgeable about museum standards and operations in practice?
• A leader with five years of professional experience in decision-making roles?
• Actively engaged in the field beyond your own museum?

Our Peer Reviewers are critical to the success of both programs. Learn more or apply to join AAM’s Peer Review team at aam-us.org/programs/peer-review/apply-to-be-a-peer-reviewer.

Accreditation Commission Hail and Farewell

AAM bids farewell to Accreditation Commissioners C.J. Roberts and Rebekah Beaulieu, who both conclude their terms at the end of this year, with immense appreciation for their service and commitment to excellence over the past five years. They played an important role in guiding and supporting the commission, participants, and program during the
pandemic years, which necessitated shifts to virtual site visits and commission meetings, all while managing their own institutions through the crisis.

AAM also welcomes six new members to the Accreditation Commission:

- Greta Brunschwyler, Executive Director, Millicent Rogers Museum, Taos, New Mexico
- Norman Burns, President and CEO, Conner Prairie, Fishers, Indiana
- Quantia “Key” M. Fletcher, Museum Director, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, Little Rock, Arkansas
- Scott Harris, Executive Director, University of Mary Washington Museums, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- Steven High, Executive Director, John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida
- Laurie Norton Moffatt, Director/CEO, Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Commissioners self-nominate and are appointed by the AAM board chair based on recommendations from a five-member nominating committee comprised of representatives from the AAM Board of Directors, Accreditation Commission, and several discipline-specific organizations. This year, the nominating committee received 78 applications for six spots.

The Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations Project

This issue of Museum is part of an AAM project exploring the next horizon of museum practice with regard to voluntary repatriation, restitution, and reparations.

For an overview and timeline of recent developments in reparative practice, download our recently released report at bit.ly/reparative-practices. Watch for an upcoming collection of papers exploring preferred futures for this area of practice authored by voices from descendant communities and the museum field, and join a workshop at the 2024 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo.
TRIBUTES AND TRANSITIONS

New Jobs

Mitra Abbaspour, Curator and Head of Modern and Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA

Dianne Brás-Feliciano, Curator of Modern Art, Artis—Naples, The Baker Museum, FL

Dr. R. Ruthie Dibble, The Robert N. Shapiro Curator of American Decorative Art, Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), Salem, MA

John Fraser, Ph.D., AIA, Director of Mission Impact, Alaska SeaLife Center, Seward

Brian Howard, Executive Director, Spellman Museum of Stamps and Postal History, Weston, MA

Dr. Jiyeon Kim, Curator of Korean Art, Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), Salem, MA

Steven Mann, Head of Exhibitions, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Sean O’Connor, Chief Development Officer, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Dr. Jeffrey Richmond-Moll, The George Putnam Curator of American Art, Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), Salem, MA

Dr. Douglas Roberts, CEO and President, The Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science, Miami, FL

Andrew Sears, Assistant Curator of Northern European Paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Christine Fowler Shearer, Ph.D., Director, Allen County Museum, Lima, OH

WHAT’S YOUR CAREER NEWS?
Tell us your news at bit.ly/CareerNewsAAM.

Kudos

On July 18, His Majesty King Harald V of Norway awarded the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, Knight First Class, to National Nordic Museum’s Executive Director/CEO Eric Nelson for his longstanding work advancing Norwegian-American relations. The honor was presented to Nelson by Norway’s Ambassador to the United States, Anniken R. Krutnes, during a ceremony in Seattle. This is Nelson’s third knighthood from a Nordic head of state. He is also a Knight of the Order of the White Rose of Finland and a Knight First Class of the Royal Order of the Polar Star (Sweden).

Retirements

Bruce Fafard, CEO of the Museum of Science & History (MOSH) in Jacksonville, Florida, will retire in February 2024. Fafard was appointed as the museum’s CEO in October 2020. Under his leadership, MOSH has restored its annual attendance to pre-pandemic levels. New programs launched during his tenure include on-site voluntary prekindergarten (VPK); the “Silver Space Series” serving seniors (ages 55 and over); and the “Passport Series,” which are quarterly events that celebrate the region’s diverse cultures. MOSH’s Board of Trustees has retained Kittleman to lead a national search. Details about the position will be shared at kittlemansearch.com and themosh.org.

In Memoriam

Evans Richardson IV (1980–2023) will be remembered for his dedication, leadership, and amplification of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in the museum field. Richardson served as the Chief of Staff at the Studio Museum in Harlem for nearly a decade and on the AAM Accreditation Commission for over three years, including his tenure as Commission Chair. He was a graduate of Columbia University and Yale University.
Far off, I gaze at the white clouds,
I think deeply of the ancients ...
I think of you, recluses:
A thousand years after, I cherish your principles.
Searching their essence, I cannot exhaust it.
That the ancients cannot be with me
only I can know how sorely I regret it.

Tao Chien (Tao Yuan-ming)
MUSEUM DIPLOMACY
How Cultural Institutions Shape Global Engagement
By Sarah E.K. Smith and Sascha Priewe

“Cultural diplomacy is rapidly becoming a hot topic. As we read of its permutations in this valuable book of essays on the subject, it is a book that will surely influence, even redirect the course of museum practice.” —William Underwood Eiland, former director, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

Museum Diplomacy features case studies from across the world that cover almost every aspect of museum work.

2023 • 261 pages
978-1-5381-3721-5 • $55.00 • Paper
978-1-5381-3720-8 • $145.00 • Cloth
978-1-5381-3722-2 • $52.00 • eBook

DIMENSIONS OF CURATION
Considering Competing Values for Intentional Exhibition Practices
By Ann Rowson Love and Pat Villeneuve

“A must-read publication for museum professionals and advocates, Dimensions of Curation offers a critical and dynamic approach to the assessment of curatorial practice. Villeneuve and Love demonstrate a unique understanding of the nuanced relationships that drive and govern cultural institutions.” —Keidra Daniels Navaroli, McKnight Doctoral Fellow, University of Central Florida

2023 • 272 pages
978-1-5381-6736-6 • $55.00 • Paper
978-1-5381-6734-2 • $125.00 • Cloth
978-1-5381-6735-9 • $52.00 • eBook

ACTIVATING THE ART MUSEUM
Designing Experiences for the Health Professions
By Ruth Slavin, Ray Williams, and Corinne Zimmermann

“An excellent presentation of the ways art museums engage in innovative programs with health professionals by connecting the fields of art and medicine. Written by three renowned museum educators the publication offers keen insights into the need for thoughtful collaborations, approaches to teaching in the galleries and addresses important themes.” —Bonnie Pitman, director of Art-Brain Innovations, The University of Texas Center for BrainHealth and former director of Dallas Museum of Art

2023 • 216 pages
978-1-5381-5854-8 • $55.00 • Paper
978-1-5381-5855-5 • $52.00 • eBook

SAVE 20% Use promo code AAMPRESS20 at checkout.

www.rowman.com | 800-462-6420
Join advocates from across the country in February!

Museums Advocacy Day mobilizes museum advocates nationwide to help ensure we reach every member of Congress with our message: museums need support, and are essential to communities. Your participation matters now and always. Together we communicate with lawmakers and their staff to ensure museums are included as crucial legislative policies are enacted, and critical funding decisions are made.

Don’t forget! Advocating for museums isn’t limited to Museums Advocacy Day. AAM provides the resources and information you need to advocate for museums year-round from wherever you are. To explore our robust resources, visit: aam-us.org/advocacy

Learn more about what to expect! aam-us.org/museums-advocacy