



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

November 9, 2022

Mr. Robert Mayo
Auctioneer and CEO
BidMayo.com
16513 Cornerstone Drive
Belton, MO 64012

Dear Mr. Mayo:

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) was recently informed of the permanent closure of the Medicine's Hall of Fame and Museum in Shawnee, Kansas. An [auction](#) of its collections is currently ongoing via your online service, including a large number of objects of indigenous origin from North and South America, as well as Africa. We have serious concerns with this auction and we urge you to immediately cease this sale until culturally affiliated tribes can repatriate any of their objects of patrimony.

It is our understanding that at least some of the items in question are human remains, associated grave goods of Native American tribal origin, or objects of cultural patrimony. To sell such items may be in violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA; Title 18 of the U.S. Code Section 1170), depending on the provenance of the objects. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Art Crimes Unit is currently reviewing the auction list.

Second, and in a larger context, the sale of such items directly violates our Principles of Archaeological Ethics: *The SAA has long recognized that the buying and selling of objects out of archaeological context is contributing to the destruction of the archaeological record on the American continents and around the world. The commercialization of archaeological objects—their use as commodities to be exploited for personal enjoyment or profit—results in the destruction of archaeological sites and of contextual information that is essential to understanding the archaeological record. Archaeologists should therefore carefully weigh the benefits to scholarship of a project against the costs of potentially enhancing the commercial value of archaeological objects. Whenever possible they should discourage, and should themselves avoid, activities that enhance the commercial value of archaeological objects, especially objects that are not curated in public institutions, or readily available for scientific study, public interpretation, and display.*

Commercialization of the archaeological record directly results in the destruction of our shared history, and in the degradation of the living cultures to which the trafficked objects belong. The SAA has long worked against this trend, through support for the Antiquities Act and the enactment and implementation

of the National Historic Preservation Act, Archaeological Resources Protection Act, NAGPRA, and various international treaties and agreements that seek to prevent looting and trafficking of archaeological and ethnographic materials around the globe. We are urging Congress to enact legislation to prevent the export of stolen objects of Native American cultural patrimony, to prevent them from ending up in overseas auction houses. We also work for the proper curation of items in museum and storage facilities, and when necessary, for deaccessioning of items under a careful process of consideration for the future care of the pieces.

We call on the BidbyMayo.com auction house to suspend the sale of all objects from the former museum's collections that are of indigenous cultural origin until 1) the provenance of all of the items is established; and 2) the Native American tribes or (where applicable) foreign nations of origin are notified about the items in question and have had the opportunity to provide input upon their final disposition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Sandweiss', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel H. Sandweiss, Ph.D., RPA
President