



April 11, 2013

Mr. Georges Delettrez
Président du Conseil d'Administration
Drouot-Richelieu
9, rue Drouot
75009 Paris, FRANCE

Dear Mr. Delettrez,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) wishes to express its strong opposition to the upcoming sale at the Drouot-Richelieu Gallery of dozens of Hopi Indian Katsinam masks. The importance of these objects to the Hopi, the questionable nature of their removal from Hopi lands, France's commitment to the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the adverse effects brought about by the commercialization of cultural heritage items all require the cancellation of the planned sale and the commencement of discussions for their return to Hopi.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

The literature accompanying the auction indicates that the items for sale were gathered in 1930 by "an amateur during his stay in the United States." While the removal of the materials may not have violated state or federal law at the time, doing so was certainly a violation of tribal law and custom. The early twentieth century was a time of extreme poverty in Hopi. It is possible any sales at that time were made under duress. As the Hopi have stated, the Katsinam masks are sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony, vital to the expression of their spiritual beliefs. It was illegal for any member of the Hopi to possess individually, sell, or otherwise divest the masks from tribal ownership.

SAA has long stood against the buying and selling of objects out of archaeological context. As noted in our Principles of Archaeological Ethics, commercialization "*...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.*" The preceding certainly holds true for the objects listed for auction. In addition, the auction's scattering of the collection to potential buyers around the world would further degrade the irreplaceable information and context that the masks possess.

Finally, France was one of the first signatories to the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 12 of the Declaration states, in part, that "*Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies;*"

and “*the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects.*” By continuing the status of the Katsinam masks as commodities to be traded, the planned auction would thus deprive the Hopi of their rights under international law and agreement.

There is a solution to this situation. Article 12 of the Declaration also calls upon signatory states to “*enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.*” SAA respectfully requests that the auction be cancelled, and that the collection’s current possessor work with France and the Hopi to repatriate the objects in question.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeffrey H. Altschul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jeffrey Altschul, Ph.D., RPA
President