



December 16, 2012

Ms. Wallis Annenberg
Chairman of the Board, President and CEO
Annenberg Foundation
2000 Avenue of the Stars
Suite 1000 S
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Dear Ms. Annenberg,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) wishes to express its gratitude to the Annenberg Foundation for purchasing 24 of the 27 Native American sacred masks that went up for auction in Paris recently, with the intent of returning them to their tribes of origin. This great act of generosity will help preserve and protect the cultural heritage and spiritual values of Hopi and San Carlos Apache peoples, and, hopefully, set a strong example in archaeological conservation for the rest of the world to follow.

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.

Our Society strongly opposed the auction of these sensitive items. We have 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.*”

In addition, though the removal, during the 1930's, of the materials from tribal lands by the original collector did not break state or federal law at the time, doing so was certainly a violation of tribal law and custom. The Katsinam masks, for example, are sacred objects critical to the expression of the Hopi's spiritual beliefs. No Hopi can possess individually, sell, or otherwise divest the masks from tribal ownership. Given the above, we informed the auction house—without success—that the scattering of the collection to potential buyers around the world would further degrade the irreplaceable information and context that the masks possess, in addition to contributing to the erosion of the concerned tribes' spiritual traditions.

The Annenberg Foundation's exemplary action prevented this outcome. It also is a sterling example of private persons and organizations joining national and global groups in saving cultural heritage for the benefit of the whole world, rather than monetizing it to the advantage of a few.

With great regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey H. Altschul". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jeffrey H. Altschul, Ph.D., RPA
President

CC: Charles Annenberg Weingarten
Vice President and Director

Gregory Annenberg Weingarten
Vice President and Director

Lauren Bon
Vice President and Director