

Autumn Auction Season

The autumn 1998 auction season for American Indian art was a watershed for the market. In a dramatic auction at a major New York house, some concerned collectors demonstrated support for American Indian repatriation, while others dug in their heels and ignored the requests of tribes for the return of objects important to their spiritual and cultural life. For those who have looked for an ethical response from the market to Native American criticism of the sale of sacred material, events were heartening.

Each season, the Repatriation Foundation notifies relevant tribes when material that might be sensitive is published in pre-auction catalogues. Auction house catalogues mentioned in Fall 1998 notifications included Christie's, Sotheby's, Skinner, and Weschler's. However, the Sotheby's auction brought the strongest response from tribes. Four tribes or tribal groups expressed concern to the Repatriation Foundation about various lots offered on December 2, 1998.

Three of those wrote letters and made their letters to Sotheby's public. When Native American complaints were described by the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, and regional papers, a number of supporters contacted the Repatriation Foundation. Some of those supporters attended the auction, personally purchased three of the disputed objects, and immediately announced their intention to repatriate them.

An Aleutian group was among those who wrote to Sotheby's. "These objects are vitally important to the heritage of the Aleut people," wrote Allison Young, Cultural Heritage Director of the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association of Alaska, a federally recognized tribal organization. The Aleut organization sent letters to Sotheby's and to the consignors of some rare Aleut material — a mask and a wood hat — in an attempt to stop their sale. An Aleut delegation which included Dimitri Philemonof, president of the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association, flew to New York just before the auction and met with one of the consignors. The Aleut delegation asked the consignor to hold the objects until the Aleut People could buy them at a fair market price, if he would not simply repatriate them outright. The hat was withdrawn, but was not repatriated or offered for sale to the Aleuts. The mask, however, was not withdrawn. It was purchased by a group of four generous supporters, and



Board members of the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association Arlene Gunderson, (l), and O. Patricia Lekanoff-Gregory, (r) examine the Aleut mask repatriated after the December 2 Sotheby's auction. The mask will be on public display at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art beginning in August.

returned immediately to the Aleut delegation. The benefactors were Ann Roberts, Executive Director of the Fund of the Four Directions, Sheri Sandler of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Anne Bleecker Corcos, a co-founder of S.E.E.D.S. (Seeking Equanimity on Earth and Diversity in the Sacred), and Isa Vogel, a longtime supporter of Native American repatriation.

The American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation is a non-federally funded intercultural partnership committed to assisting in the return of sacred ritual material to American Indian nations and to educating the public of the importance of repatriation.

Welcome

Many long-time supporters of the Repatriation Foundation responded generously again this year to our annual appeal for contributions. We thank all of you for your donations, your encouragement, and your offers of volunteer assistance. The Repatriation Foundation relies on the contributions of supporters for our continued existence.

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Welcome, and a warm thank you to all of our supporters!

Elizabeth Sackler, President

RETROSPECT / UPCOMING

☼ President Elizabeth Sackler spoke at a summit meeting of Northern California tribes in Eureka in February, 1999. She led a repatriation workshop at the same meeting. Dr. Sackler facilitated a session on "Non-NAGPRA Repatriation" at the eighth annual Keepers of the Treasures conference, held in Williston, North Dakota, May, 1999.

☼ Anne Cassidy co-facilitated a workshop at the recent Keepers conference on "Repatriation and the Internet" with Pollyanna Nordstrand of the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum. Anne Cassidy is also scheduled to speak at the annual meeting of the American Indian Museums Association in September, 1999 in Baltimore. The AIMA is a member of the American Association for State and Local History.

☼ Meetings and conferences hosted by tribes, institutions, and associations have become important arenas for repatriation specialists. They provide a chance to share experiences, negotiate, and disseminate information. Conferences recently attended by representatives of the Foundation include: *Art, Antiquity, and the Law*, an international conference held at Rutgers University in October, 1998; the NAGPRA Review Committee meeting in Santa Fe in December 1998; the annual conference of the American Association of Museums in Cleveland in April, 1999; *Respecting Native American Cultures*, jointly hosted by the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center and Yale University in April, 1999; *Who Owns Culture*, hosted by Columbia University, New York City, in April, 1999.

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In an unusual development, two members of the Board of Trustees of the American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation were among those who contributed to the mask's purchase. The Foundation does not purchase, nor does it encourage the purchase of material that tribes do not consider appropriate for public sale. The two Board members, however, were moved to personally support the purchase of the Aleutian mask.

The Yurok Tribe of Northern California wrote to Sotheby's about the ceremonial dance apron offered at the same auction. "This apron was an integral part of our ceremonies, which are still celebrated today," explained NAGPRA Coordinator Dale Anne Frye Sherman, in her letter. The Yurok Tribe, like the Aleuts, asked that the apron be held until they were in a position to purchase it, if the consignor did not wish to simply return the apron as a gift. The request was denied. When bidding for the apron opened in spite of the Yurok plea, Ann Roberts competed successfully for it, and has since returned it to the tribe.

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The Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Montana wrote to the Sotheby's American Indian Art Specialist about some of the Sioux material offered. Citing possible NAGPRA violations as well as larger ethical concerns, they asked that seven lots be removed. Six of the seven were removed, and the remaining object, a ceremonial club, was purchased by Nancy and Lawrence Gutstein, and returned to the Fort Peck tribes (*see story at right*).

Tribal objections to the sale of some lots at the Sotheby's auction brought the issue of repatriation and the art market to public attention. Strong support for Native Americans was demonstrated by the generous collectors who repatriated the material they purchased. We hope that in the future more consignors and dealers will consider consultation with Native Americans to be a necessary part of the process.

In Memorium
 We join with many others in mourning the tragic loss of Ingrid Washinawatok, Lahe'ena' Gay and Terence Fritas on March 4, 1999.

Ft. Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes Object to Auction

When Warner Southern College put a number of Plains ceremonial objects on the auction block for Sotheby's December 2, 1998, auction, the Ft. Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Montana were concerned. The Ft. Peck tribes had never received any notification from the college regarding its Native American collection, even though the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act requires consultation with relevant tribes when material may be repatriable under the Act. The publication in Sotheby's auction catalogue of the Plains Indian material was the first word that Curley Youpee, Director of the Ft. Peck tribes' Cultural Resources Department, had received of Warner Southern College's holdings.



Curley Youpee is the Director of the Cultural Resources Department of the Ft. Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Montana.

Mr. Youpee sent a letter to Sotheby's in New York objecting to the sale of material that might be covered by NAGPRA, material that was in any case part of ongoing ritual in Dakota and Nakoda practice. He identified seven catalogue entries — six from Warner Southern College — that were of concern to his tribe, citing legal concerns, but also emphasizing that "sacredness cannot be displaced from our ceremonial objects." Moments before the sale, Sotheby's withdrew six of the lots specifically cited by Mr. Youpee, leaving one to be sold.

The item sold was not from Warner Southern College, and therefore was not in question as to its legal standing under NAGPRA. It is legal to sell Native American sacred or burial objects if they are from a non-federally funded collection. That object, a ceremonial club, was purchased by Nancy and Lawrence Gutstein of New York. Immediately after the purchase, they announced their intention to return it to the Ft. Peck tribes who had objected to its sale.

Mr. Gutstein, who is the co-chair of I.B.M.'s Native American Indian Diversity Task Force, was traveling in Dallas when he learned about the controversy surrounding Sotheby's autumn auction from a newspaper article. He contacted Repatriation Foundation president Elizabeth Sackler. With the consent of the tribes involved, letters to Sotheby's from three of the concerned tribal groups were made available to the press and were also shared with those who contacted the Foundation about the situation. Mr. and Mrs. Gutstein attended the auction in order to support American Indian objections to the sale. When asked why they as collectors would purchase anything in order to give it away, Mr. Gutstein explained, "We're not collectors — we're correctors!"

Mr. Youpee received the club on behalf of the Fort Peck tribes on December 15, 1998.

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Tennessee Boy Scouts Send World War II Totem Pole Back To The Aleutian Islands

A totem pole, carved during World War II in the Aleutian Islands, made a 4,000 mile journey back to Alaska, thanks to the efforts of Tennessee Native Americans and the generosity of a Tennessee Boy Scout group. It was picked up from the Boxwell Boy Scout Reservation in Wilson County, Tennessee, on March 13, and delivered to Unalaska Island, Alaska on April 24. It will be displayed at the Museum of the Aleutians when the Museum's new building is completed.

The totem pole was erected on Kiska Island while Naval forces occupied the island as part of the U.S. defense of the mainland from Japan. In the early 1960's, during a military clean-up, it was shipped to a Navy base in California. Eventually, it was donated to a group of Boy Scouts in Lebanon, Tennessee.

The American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation was contacted about the totem pole by Dan Kirby of the Tennessee Alliance for Native American Rights, a group assisting with the repatriation of Native American remains and burial objects in the Tennessee area. The Repatriation Foundation researched the totem pole's origins and contacted Allison Young, Cultural Heritage Director of the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association, who suggested that the totem pole be donated to the Museum of the Aleutians. Director of the museum Rick Knecht will oversee its installation in Alaska.

Doug Kirby (no relation to Dan), who is Advisor for Native American Activities for the Wa-Hi-Nasa Lodge of the Middle Tennessee Council, Boy Scouts of America, worked with

Perspectives

Tribal response to the sale or auction of Native American material allows dealers and collectors to reassess the appropriateness of the sale and to consider alternatives. The approach that tribes decide to take varies greatly, according to the situation. Following are excerpts from a letter written to a prominent collector by Allison Young, Cultural Heritage Director for the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association (A/PIA). The A/PIA is the non-profit federally recognized tribal organization representing Aleut tribes of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands, Alaska. The letter was written in an effort to halt the sale of an ancient Aleut mask and a wooden cap. The request was denied, as was a request to hold the sale of those two items until the Aleut people could purchase them. In the end, however, a group of concerned collectors joined together to purchase the mask and returned it immediately. The cap was removed from the sale moments before the auction began.

"It has come to my attention that several objects from your collection are scheduled for auction at Sotheby's on December 2, 1998. These objects are vitally important to the heritage of the Aleut people. They are important for several reasons. First, both are objects which the Aleut people recognize as objects of cultural patrimony — they are objects created for ritual purposes by their ancestors. Second, they are part of cultural traditions that have been lost and Aleuts are struggling to regain. Unfortunately few of these objects exist in Alaska where Aleuts might be able to see them and learn from them. Most Aleuts have only ever seen their traditional cultural objects in photographs from books, magazines and journals. It is virtually impossible to keep traditions alive or revitalize old ones if there are no objects to admire, learn from and emulate. Flat photographs offer few insights into how an object was really made or the creative strength of an artist as they developed an artifact...

"I ask that you consider donating these objects to us. I know you can receive a tax donation for this. I know that you will have the gratitude of the Aleut people who are earnestly working to save their cultural traditions and learn from the objects created by their ancestors. Please consider a direct donation to us, or alternatively, to the American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation in New York City, who would in turn donate the objects to us."

.....

the Repatriation Foundation to return the huge wood carving. Mr. Kirby had some difficulty finding a shipper willing to take on the daunting task of hauling the large, awkward, somewhat fragile pole to the middle of the Bering Sea. After refusals from some major shippers, David Hagar of American Manufacturing Inc. Transportation Division agreed to the job. The journey included a 10-day ride on a barge from Seattle to Unalaska Island.

The case was unique for the Repatriation Foundation in that the return was initiated by Native Americans and involved an object that may not have been carved by a Native American. Nevertheless, the totem pole's return to the Aleutians is emblematic of the way that Native American repatriation has encouraged a reassessment of the ownership of exotic artifacts of other Peoples.

Repatriation in Australia: An American Collector's Gift

Connoisseurs of Native American art have increasingly chosen to repatriate material in their collections that is sacred to the tribe of origin. It is not uncommon in such cases for returned material to be carried or mailed many miles, even across the continent. But last fall, one North Carolina man initiated a trans-Pacific dialogue that resulted in the return to central Australia of an Aboriginal churinga stone.

Charles Merrill, an environmentalist, did not at first realize how revered and powerful to its Aboriginal group of origin the churinga stone actually is. He had decided to return it so that it could be sold to raise funds for the protection of an island in the Torres Straits. The island is sacred to traditional Aboriginal women, and was being threatened with the development of a vacation resort. Once he began a dialogue with the repatriation office of the Central Land Council in Alice Springs, Australia, however, he learned that the churinga stone is too sacred and too powerful to be sold under any circumstances.

Mr. Merrill began his search for the rightful recipients of the stone by contacting the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. He was referred to the Central Land

Council in Alice Straits. Mr. Merrill was eventually asked to mail the object. He was given careful, specific instructions regarding its packaging, not only for protection against breakage, but also for the protection of those handling and opening the package containing an object potentially distressful and even dangerous to those who are not traditionally allowed to see it.

For Mr. Merrill, who inherited the stone from his late wife, Evangeline Johnson Merrill, the repatriation of sacred material to Indigenous peoples is very important, and has a spiritual relation to his work as an environmentalist. After coming across the Repatriation Foundation's web site, he wrote about his return of the churinga stone. He explained, "Healing our environment is not just about protecting virgin land from development. It is about respecting the traditional culture of human beings, and to merchandise sacred ritual objects under the label of "primitive art" is an egregious act of philistinism."

At this writing, the Central Land Council, which now has custody of the stone, is in consultation with senior Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal Traditional Owners regarding the appropriate region and people for its return.

Hopi Study Hazardous Museum Chemicals

Repatriation of American Indian material that has been subjected to standard museum conservation practices has introduced new challenges. Frequently, toxic chemicals have been applied by conservators or collectors to guard material from insects and deterioration. In these cases, repatriated ceremonial material cannot be safely handled without gloves and other protective measures. American Indians have already been presented with this situation in material returned from some museums under NAGPRA.

Much that is repatriated to American Indian groups is not destined for recurring ceremonial use. But a significant number of returns involve sacred objects meant to be

handled or worn in ceremony. In those cases, the presence of toxic chemicals can be dangerous.

The Hopi Tribal Cultural Preservation Office has undertaken systematic documentation of the history of conservation methods and the chemicals used by conservators. Their work is directed toward the identification and removal or neutralization where possible of chemicals present on repatriated material. Until it is possible to remove or neutralize these poisons, adequate protection from them will be necessary for anyone who comes into contact with treated objects.

This year, the Hopi Tribe received a National Park Service grant to study

the possibility of neutralizing poisons used on Hopi sacred objects, a project called the "Hopi Kachina Friends Pesticide Documentary Project." The Hopi are also cooperating in studies with the School of American Research, the Arizona Poison Control Center, and the Arizona State Museum. Their work will be important for many Indigenous groups worldwide who are now accepting back ceremonial material that has been chemically treated.

If you would like additional information, please contact the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office to speak with Director Leigh Kuwanwisiwna, at (520) 734-3751 or Repatriation Coordinator Lee Lomayestewa, at (520) 734-3755.

In Print

A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present.

Ward Churchill. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997. Explores the history of holocaust and denial in this hemisphere, beginning with the arrival of Columbus. Uses the full scope of the nazi-perpetrated Holocaust in Europe as a backdrop against which to argue that genocide has been and still is carried out against American Indians.

Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians.

Devon A. Mihesuah, editor. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. This collection of critical essays by Native American scholars focuses upon the relationship between Native American peoples and academics. In the chapter entitled "Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America," philosopher Laurie Ann Whitt (Choctaw) critiques the failure of academics to investigate fully the "marketing of Native America and, most tellingly, of Native spirituality."

Playing Indian. Philip J. Deloria. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. Explores how white Americans have used

their ideas about Indians to shape national identity in different eras — and how Indian people have reacted to these imitations of their native dress, language, and ritual.

Native American Voices: A Reader. Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1998. A unique collection of works designed to present readers with an exciting introduction to the diverse field of Native American studies. The collection, which challenges myths and stereotypes, contains scholarly articles, oral history and testimony, songs, poetry, and other documents.

For This Land: Writings on Religion in America. Vine Deloria, Jr., New York and London: Routledge, 1999. Brings together over thirty years of Vine Deloria's work, expressing his concern for the religious dimensions and implication of human existence.

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