

POLICY FOR DEACCESSION AND DISPOSAL OF WORKS OF ART

Deaccession

Where appropriate, deaccessioning works of art is an integral part of defining and refining the scope and quality of the collection and supporting the mission and legacy of the Corcoran. Deaccessioning is defined as "the process used to remove an object permanently from the collection." Strategically, deaccessions will be governed by the Collection Plans and they will be considered with the same seriousness and deliberation as the process of acquisitions and accessions. The museum will make an effort to be open and candid in the process with the knowledge that it holds its collection as a public trust.

The deaccession process will be thoughtful, collaborative and deliberate. While there is no specific reference to schedule and deadlines, the process will be carried out in an orderly fashion, allowing the Curatorial and Registrar departments to complete all research and documentation. The decision to remove a work from the collection will not be governed by external deadlines. Full justification of the removal of an object from the collection must be submitted in writing by the appropriate curator. The proposal undergoes review and approval by the Chief Curator, the Director, the Collections Committee, and finally, by the Board of Trustees. The Procedure for Deaccession and Disposal of Works of Art outlines the process.

Criteria for Deaccessioning

To be considered for deaccessioning, an object must meet at least one of the following criteria:

Relevance: Continued inclusion of the object in the permanent collections does not support the mission of the museum or fall within the goals for a particular collection as defined in its Collection Plan.

Condition: The object has deteriorated, has been damaged beyond repair, or poses a health hazard.

Care of the Object: The Museum is not able to provide proper care for the object or meet with specific conservation requirements.

Duplication: The object is an exact duplicate of an existing collection item, or duplicate items of a superior or similar nature are represented in the collections.

Authenticity: The object is found to be falsely attributed or documented, or proved to be a fake or forgery.

Provenance: The museum's true ownership of the item has been found to be illegitimate or illegal.

Quality: The object is an inferior example of a particular artist or medium.

Depth: A collection has many quality works by an artist or in a medium and the removal of one or more examples will not affect the overall quality of the collection.

Legal and Ethical Requirements

1. Only objects formally accessioned into the collection can be deaccessioned.
2. An object must be in the collection of the museum for at least five years before consideration for deaccessioning.
3. The museum must possess clear title to the object before deaccessioning.
4. Employees, staff, members of the Collections Committee and Board of Trustees and their immediate family members may not purchase or otherwise benefit from the disposition of a deaccessioned object.
5. Any restrictions placed on an object by a donor will be strictly observed. If the object to be deaccessioned is a gift or bequest with no restrictions, donors or their heirs will be notified, when possible, of the museum's intention to deaccession the object. These efforts are considered a courtesy and do not constitute a request for permission to dispose of the object, nor shall a donor be given preferential treatment in reacquiring the object.
6. An object in the collection of the museum by a living artist may be deaccessioned on rare occasions. The museum will contact the artist to notify him/her of its intentions before proceeding with deaccessioning.
7. The museum will retain independent experts, as appropriate, to review and consult on proposed deaccessions and curatorial strategy.
8. The museum's identifying marks will not be removed from any deaccessioned object prior to its disposal.

Disposal

Disposal is defined as "the physical removal of an object from the premises of the museum." The removal of deaccessioned objects will be carried out in accordance with any local, District, and Federal regulations, and in accordance with the ethical standards set forth by AAM and AAMD. Disposition of approved deaccessions shall take place in a timely fashion. In determining the appropriate method of disposition, consideration should be given to the best interests of the museum, its donors, the public and scholarly communities it serves, and the public trust it represents.

Methods of Disposal

Donation: The object may be donated to another museum or educational organization.

Exchange: The object can be exchanged with another museum or educational organization, in return for an object of equal or greater value that falls within the mission of the museum and scope of the collection plan.

Sale: The object may be sold at public auction or by private sale. If sold by auction, the object must be clearly identified in the auction catalogue as the property of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. If sold by private sale, the Gallery will use a reputable third-party agent to conduct the transaction and will obtain a valuation of the object independent of the selling agent. The Gallery must take reasonable steps to ensure that the private sale does not violate the conflict of interest rule as stated in number 4 of the Legal and Ethical Requirements of the Corcoran Policy for Deaccession and Disposal of Works of Art.

Destruction: If an object has deteriorated or been damaged beyond repair, poses a health hazard, or holds neither intrinsic nor monetary value, it may be destroyed.

Proceeds of a Sale

Sale proceeds of all deaccessions will be restricted to the acquisition of works of art that support the mission of the Corcoran. The museum will uphold the current professional standard for the use of funds gained from sale as stated by the Association of Art Museum Directors:

Proceeds from a deaccessioned work are used only to acquire other works of art—the proceeds are never used as operating funds, to build a general endowment, or for any other expenses. Funds from deaccessioning can be invested in an acquisitions endowment earmarked to support the long-term growth of a museum's collection.¹

Sale proceeds from an object will be deposited into the Central Acquisition Fund. On a periodic basis, a percentage of the Fund will be divided and deposited into separate acquisition funds dedicated to each of the collections: American Art, Contemporary Art, Photography, Decorative Arts and European Art. The Chief Curator and Director will recommend a percentage and its fund allocation to the Board of Trustees for approval. All acquisition funds will be used in accordance with the Policy and Procedure for Acquisitions and Accessions.

The institution will make the Central Acquisition Fund into a restricted account to be used only for art acquisition.

Change of Policy or Procedure

Any changes to the Policy and Procedure for the Deaccession and Disposal of Works of Art must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

¹ "Art Museums and the Practice of Deaccessioning," Association of Art Museum Directors, 2007.