



December 2, 2015

Mr. Alain Leroy  
Maitre  
EVE  
9, rue Milton  
75009 Paris, FRANCE

Dear Mr. Leroy:

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) expresses its strong opposition to the December 7, 2015 sale at the EVE Gallery of dozens of American Indian Katchina dolls, ceremonial masks, and sculptures. The importance of these objects to the Hopi and other tribes, the adverse effects brought about by the commercialization of cultural heritage items, and France's commitment to the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, require the cancellation of the planned sale.

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.

In 2013, SAA and other organizations objected to an auction in Paris of similar items. Though we were unable to prevent the sale, a U.S. philanthropic foundation stepped in and purchased many of the objects, which were later repatriated to the tribes from which they had been illegally procured. The reasons for opposing that previous auction still stand today. Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—the period of origin for most of the items to be sold on December 7—was a time of extreme poverty for Native Americans of the Southwest. It is possible any sales at that time were made under duress. The ceremonial masks in specific are sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony, vital to the expression of tribal spiritual beliefs. It was and remains illegal for tribal members 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 items 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 Katchina dolls, masks, and sculptures as commodities to be traded, the planned auction would thus deprive the affected tribes of their rights under international law and agreement.

SAA urges the cancellation of the auction, and the commencement of discussions for the repatriation of these objects to their tribes of origin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Gifford-Gonzalez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Diane" written in a slightly larger, more legible script than the last name.

Diane Gifford-Gonzalez  
President