

Professional Practices for Art Museum Curators

Association of Art Museum Curators 2007

Statement of Mission

Adopted by the membership of the AAMC, April 2001.

Curators have a primary responsibility for the acquisition, care, display, and interpretation of works of art. The Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) was founded in 2001 to support the role of curators in shaping the mission of art museums in North America. The goals of the AAMC are to:

- *Serve as an advocacy group for the curatorial profession*
- *Articulate the standards for the profession*
- *Promote research and scholarship through an annual meeting and educational programs on selected themes held at venues throughout North America*
- *Exchange information through a website and monthly newsletter*
- *Facilitate online discussions addressing a wide variety of relevant topics*
- *Recognize distinguished achievement in the field through annual awards*
- *Facilitate the exchange of information about traveling exhibitions*
- *Provide a collegial forum for discussion about museum issues in North America*
- *Accomplish these goals in cooperation with museum directors, trustees and other staff*

Contents

- 4 Preface and Acknowledgments
- 6 General Principles
- 7 The Curator's Responsibilities
 - 7 As Related to the Collection
 - 8 As Related to Exhibitions
- 9 Scholarship and Professional Development
 - 9 Scholarly Activity
 - 10 Intellectual Property
- 12 The Curator's Role and Relationship to Particular Constituencies
 - 12 The Work of Art
 - 12 The Public
 - 12 The Director and Other Museum Administrators
 - 13 Development Staff
 - 13 Trustees and Patrons
 - 13 Other Museum Relationships
 - 14 Professional and Academic Contacts
- 15 Potential Conflicts of Interest
 - 15 Relations with Dealers, Auction Houses, Private Collectors, and Living Artists
 - 17 Personal Collecting
 - 19 External Professional Commitments, Employment, and Public Statements
- 21 Conclusions
- 21 Sources Cited
- 22 Notes

Preface and Acknowledgments

At the time of the establishment of the Association of Art Museum Curators, the first board of trustees, reflecting the strong interest of the new membership, determined that one of the highest priorities for the AAMC was the compilation of a document that would provide a manual for professional standards held by art museum curators. This mandate acknowledged our responsibility as curators to agree upon our own professional values, especially in regard to existing codes of ethics and professional standards established by the American Association of Museums (AAM), and the American Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). The first AAMC Board, under the leadership of Gary Tinterow, advanced this priority to the membership, where it was enthusiastically embraced. His initiative was carried on with the support and leadership of the succeeding AAMC president, Elizabeth Easton, and the board of trustees. A standing committee for professional standards was established to write these guidelines, nearly three years in the making. This document, written by volunteers from our membership, can now provide a basis, albeit incomplete and imperfect, upon which we all can articulate our professional goals and standards of behavior in the present and future.

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General Principles

Members of the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) believe that the core mission of art museums¹ is to collect, preserve, study, interpret, and display works of art for the benefit of the public. As dedicated professionals trained in the history of art, curators have a primary responsibility to carry out this mission, in close collaboration with the museum director² and other members of the staff. Curators must consider the well-being of the museum in which they are employed. These responsibilities must be balanced with the ethics of their scholarly disciplines. Whenever allegiance to ethical standards poses the risk of conflict with the interests of the museum, curators must seek direction from an appropriate authority (their director, department head, or museum counsel). Curators must recognize that they hold positions of trust and should act with uncompromising integrity.

The following manual surveys the range of current practices at museums in the United States and Canada. It has been compiled after consulting professional guidelines of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), the American Association of Museums (AAM), the College Art Association (CAA), as well as those of many museums. It is neither comprehensive nor prescriptive. Instead, the document outlines the typical responsibilities and challenges that curators may face in their work and identifies some typical and appropriate practices that have developed within the profession. Curators are encouraged to familiarize themselves with their employer's guidelines regarding professional conduct.

Although curators have many duties and responsibilities, their primary value to the museum lies in their specific expertise. Curators are art historians engaged in scholarship with a special emphasis on physical objects. Many museums provide the necessary resources—library, research time, grant and sabbatical opportunities—for curators to pursue scholarship. This scholarly activity enhances curators' understanding of the works in their care, and redounds to the credit of their museum.

Given their unique position as art historians and keepers, curators have particular knowledge of and access to art objects that can generate valuable new insights.

The Curator's Responsibilities

A AS RELATED TO THE COLLECTION

The curator's primary responsibility is the care, presentation, interpretation and acquisition of works of art in the collection. This means that a work of art under the curator's care, and works under consideration for acquisition, must be thoroughly researched in order to ensure their authenticity, quality, and historical importance. Uncertainties about a work's authenticity, origins, condition, presentation, or provenance should immediately be brought to the attention of the museum administration. The proper care, presentation, and interpretation of works from the collection require that curators have broad, substantive knowledge of art history and specialized knowledge in their fields. Curators should maintain that expertise in order to fulfill their responsibility to their collections and their profession.

- 1 *Acquisitions.* Acting in accordance with the policy of their museums, curators make recommendations for the acquisition of works of art for the collection. Acquisitions—whether through purchase, gift, or bequest—should be guided by the mission of the museum as well as by the curator's expertise. Therefore, curators, having specialized knowledge, should be involved in the decision to acquire a work and then in presenting the object to their museum's acquisition committee.
- 2 *Deaccessions.* The curator, or department chair, should initiate any recommendation for the disposition or deaccessioning of works of art from the collection. Procedures for approving proposed deaccessions differ from museum to museum: in many institutions, a curator's recommendations are considered by the director and the appropriate committee and then submitted to a board of trustees for final decision. Curators must be candid and forthcoming with their director should they have any reservations about objects proposed for deaccession, whether or not the objects emanate from their department.

- 3 *Loans.* Curators have a responsibility to safeguard the objects in their care. When working with the museum to decide whether a work of art in their permanent collection should be lent to another institution, they must consider the stability of the piece and its viability for travel, and the educational justification for the loan. In collaboration with the conservation staff, curators make recommendations to their director for all loans of works of art from the collection for which they are responsible.
- 4 *Documentation/Research.* Curators contribute to the intellectual integrity of the collection by ensuring that records on works of art under their care are properly maintained.

B AS RELATED TO EXHIBITIONS

Curators conceive and guide exhibitions that shed new light on and lead to a better understanding of particular works, artists, movements, cultures, or historical moments in the history of art. Expanding public understanding of the subject and enhancing the quality of the visitor's experience should count among the goals of any exhibition.

Teams of individuals are required to mount an exhibition. Curators work with other professionals both within and outside the museum, including registrars, conservators, educators, designers, development staff, financial officers, editors, publicists, art handlers, archivists, and security staff. To uphold the integrity of the exhibition, the curator in charge should be actively involved in all aspects of its organization.

Scholarship and Professional Development

Together with acquisition and preservation of works of art, original research and scholarly writing are among the most critical activities performed by museum curators. Curators bring to their work considerable knowledge and experience that often originates outside the museum and their research extends beyond the confines of the working week. Museums, in the form of their collections, libraries, archives, laboratories, equipment, grants, and travel funds, provide resources that contribute to the research carried out by their staff. Curators must accept the responsibility of addressing different audiences in their writing and speaking about their collections, whether a scholarly audience of their peers or a broader public without specialized knowledge of the field. This responsibility extends to their writing, for museum publications as well as labels produced for the collection galleries or special exhibitions. In adapting their scholarship for a context extending beyond their immediate peers, curators can rely upon the expertise of educators in effectively addressing the general museum visitor.

A SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

In most museums, curators are responsible for a collection, or areas of a collection, related to their scholarship and expertise; for that reason, ensuring curators' professional development through scholarly research is essential to enriching public understanding and enjoyment of the collection and to bringing distinction to the museum. Scholarly research and writing are often dependent on available time, and museums should support sustained periods of concentration for curators to undertake such projects. Many museums have programs for sabbaticals and paid or unpaid leave. This is particularly important for curators who take on ambitious projects and for those who derive benefit from travel or periods of residence elsewhere in order to pursue their scholarly interests on the museum's behalf. Opportunities to visit distant exhibitions and

collections or attend colloquia are, for most curators, as important as time to work in libraries and archives. Many museum budgets include funds for ongoing research related to the permanent collection as well as potential acquisitions. Museums benefit from their curators' participation in conferences, seminars, and other educational opportunities. Many museums pay fees and membership dues for professional organizations on their staff's behalf and underwrite the costs of traveling to and attending events sponsored by these organizations.

B INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY³

No text should be reprinted, altered, translated, or reused for a different purpose without first consulting the original author whenever possible.

- 1 *Appropriate acknowledgement of scholarly work.* Most scholarly writing is based on previous texts. Any written work consulted or adapted for a new publication should be documented or otherwise acknowledged, regardless of the source, published or unpublished. This includes, but is not limited to, research and observations performed in conservation laboratories and in curatorial departments.
- 2 *Reuse of existing texts.* Brief statements on object labels, descriptive texts, and entries in periodical publications or texts on the museum's website frequently depend on work written by museum curators and outside scholars, present and past. Whenever possible, the author of significant discoveries or ideas should be credited. It is understood, however, that the format of this material often precludes full documentation. Therefore, all staff members are urged to be especially vigilant to avoid plagiarism. At the same time, it is also acknowledged that much writing performed at museums is descriptive, not original, and that scholarly acknowledgments are therefore less applicable to this material. When there is doubt, staff should consult the author of the text in question before reuse or adaptation. Department heads should be consulted if questions of originality or sources of origin persist.

3 *Free exchange of information.* The free exchange of information is essential to progress in scholarship. All museum departments and all staff members are encouraged to share their departmental files as freely as feasible with qualified staff members and outside researchers. At the same time, it is imperative that all those who consult documentation, whether curatorial files or conservation reports, respect the authorship of that material and acknowledge their sources. To avoid the risk of error or misinterpretation, curators are advised to consult with conservators and scientists before interpreting their reports, and conservators and scientists are advised to consult with curators before drawing on curatorial files as a source.

In some instances, it may be appropriate for a curator to postpone sharing research in progress. This decision should always be made in consultation with a supervisor, and, in the interest of intellectual advancement, priority should always be given to dissemination of information.

4 *Visual documentation.* The free exchange of photographs and digital images to qualified researchers is essential to scholarship. The AAMC recommends that museums, in developing procedures for distributing visual documentation, ensure that internal and external scholarly communities are properly served. The exchange of visual documentation “for study purposes” is distinct from the commercial licensing of images for reproduction.

The Curator's Role and Relationship to Particular Constituencies

This section posits seven core areas that, together, embrace the curator's roles and relationships within the museum.

A THE WORK OF ART

The curator has a fundamental role in ensuring that works of art are properly conserved, stored, and exhibited. This includes working with relevant museum staff to prepare detailed notes about the appropriate presentation of all works of art, especially installation art and work in new media.⁴

B THE PUBLIC

Curators play a critical role in engaging the public with art through the installation and interpretation of the permanent collection, special exhibitions, and publications, and often have direct contact with the public through tours, lectures, and other programming. In addition, curators provide information and expertise on the collections and exhibitions to educators. Educators, in turn, provide curators with pedagogical strategies to fulfill public interests and needs.

C THE DIRECTOR AND OTHER MUSEUM ADMINISTRATORS

The curator's relationship with the museum's director and senior management is critical in determining curatorial effectiveness within the museum. It is also important that curators provide their director and staff with all necessary information, in a timely and appropriate manner, about issues, projects, and events that have direct bearing on the director's role.

D DEVELOPMENT STAFF

In the context of capital endowment and other campaigns, curators may be expected to work closely with a development department and participate in fundraising activities. Curators in charge of special exhibitions will likely be expected to make presentations to prospective corporate or individual sponsors; as project directors, the curators work closely with the museum's grant writers to compose grant applications. Curators are often called upon to participate in donor cultivation events as well, ranging from gallery or special exhibition tours, to brief presentations, to organizing or participating in museum-sponsored trips.

E TRUSTEES AND PATRONS

Curators may have a privileged relationship to trustees or patrons because of their shared interests in art. The museum's director generally guides the nature and extent of curators' interaction with the institution's trustees or patrons. The scope of curatorial contact with trustees can vary considerably from museum to museum, but curators often engage trustees through their recommendations for acquiring and deaccessioning of works of art. Curators may be called upon to participate in shaping an accessions policy as well as generating guidelines for deaccessioning works in the collection, for example. In some museums, committees of the board of trustees routinely call upon curators for their advice and opinions.

F OTHER MUSEUM RELATIONSHIPS

In the broadest sense, curators represent the collection—their most important responsibility—and they are the leading advocates for the permanent collection in the context of their museum's mission. Curators have a responsibility to mentor the staff in the appreciation of works of art, their care, the importance of providing public access, and the museum's overall mission. As supervisors of junior staff, interns, and curatorial fellows, for example, curators play a pivotal role in providing leadership and professional encouragement, but this spirit of collaboration must extend to the museum staff as a whole.⁵

G PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC CONTACTS

Curators are often active members of professional societies such as AAMC, CAA, or more specialized learned societies, sometimes serving as board or committee members in those organizations. They may also participate in community arts organizations—sometimes as representatives of their institutions. Curators serve on advisory committees of foundations or as panelists for government agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities or the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities for the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Program. The curator's relationship to staff at other museums and art institutions is important to shaping projects, facilitating loans, and sharing professional concerns. Curators at larger institutions fulfill an important function by providing consultation to smaller museums.

Curators are also engaged with educational institutions, particularly at the college or university level; within their museums they are usually the primary point of contact for colleagues from the academic world. In academe, curators' roles range from presenting a single lecture to serving as adjunct or full professor. Curators are often the primary point of contact for facilitating museum programs, colloquia or seminars. Curators also facilitate or initiate individual research projects on the part of both faculty and students, or may initiate individual internships in their departments for undergraduate or graduate students.⁶ Curators have an important role in providing access to the museum collection, particularly to objects not on public view. Within the museum, it is often the curator who initiates contacts between the academic community and museum staff members directly involved in making the collections available for viewing and research.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Most museums have guidelines on how staff members should interact with the various constituencies of the museum, including staff members, trustees, art dealers, collectors, journalists, and volunteers.

While museums have divergent positions about possible conflicts of interest in the areas of personal collecting, dealing, gifts, and outside consulting or employment, a general consensus maintains that when curators are presented with activities or relationships that might involve a conflict of interest (actual, potential, or perceived), or with behavior that might cause embarrassment to the museum, their professional responsibilities must take precedence over personal concerns and gain.

A RELATIONS WITH DEALERS, AUCTION HOUSES, PRIVATE COLLECTORS, AND LIVING ARTISTS

- 1 *Expert Advice.* There is a distinction between offering expert advice and authentication. Some museums permit curators to give professional advice to collectors, auction houses and dealers, whether verbally or in writing.⁷
- 2 *Authentication.* Some museums encourage curators to assist collectors and other museum professionals in identifying, authenticating, and assessing the aesthetic quality and condition of works of art, as long as they provide information without monetary or other personal remuneration.⁸
- 3 *Appraisals.* Museums deal with appraisals in a range of ways. Some require that all opinions be impartial without discussion or citation of monetary value. Other museums bar curators from providing appraisals or financial assessments of works of art except for in-house purposes.⁹

4 Gifts.

- *Artwork and In-kind.* Some museums require the written permission of the director with regard to any gift of art to curators. Others stipulate that curators may accept only gifts of nominal value. When a gift offered to a curator is judged to complement the museum's collections, the museum's needs must be considered before the gift is accepted.¹⁰ It is generally agreed that gifts that could subsequently be interpreted as an inducement to trade for other services should not be accepted.¹¹ Certain museums prohibit curators from accepting any gifts (art or cash) except as a donation to the museum.¹² Others stipulate that gifts may be accepted under certain circumstances. This may apply, for instance, when a curator has a close personal and professional relationship with an artist or collector. In such cases the curator must seek prior permission before accepting the gift.¹³

Because of the variety of institutional policies regarding in-kind donations, curators should be aware that accepting compensation of any kind from a dealer or auction house could be perceived as a conflict of interest.¹⁴ Some museums do not allow curators to accept or receive any gift in-kind for personal benefit if the offer or receipt is designed to cause the recipient to grant a privilege, concession, or benefit in connection with museum's operations.¹⁵ Some museums require written permission from the director to accept both monetary and in-kind gifts.¹⁶ Other museums allow curators to accept gifts as long as the monetary value does not exceed \$100 per calendar year.¹⁷

Sometimes dealers, collectors, artists, vendors, or auction houses will offer meals, accommodations, or travel services to a curator on official business. While such activities may be directly related to the conduct of museum business, curators should exercise discretion in accepting invitations to dinners, lunches, or other forms of entertainment offered by individual or organizations doing or wishing to do business with the museum and consider the potential for a perceived conflict of interest.¹⁸ In some cases, lodging, meals, and even travel may be considered part of donor cultivation.¹⁹ Some museums require written permission from the director to accept monetary and in-kind gifts.²⁰

A museum curator may have the opportunity to work closely with living artists, by planning exhibitions, developing publications or other museum-related activities. While an artist may wish to acknowledge a museum employee's efforts through a gift of art to the employee, these gifts present another area of potential conflict. In such situations, employees must promptly disclose the offer of such gifts to their supervisors.

- 5 *Confidentiality.* Using or disclosing information not publicly available (technical, financial, or contractual) for private benefit may present a conflict of interest.²¹ Unless disclosure is approved by the director, the following information should not be disclosed:
- security arrangements;
 - pending acquisitions;
 - prices paid for acquisitions;
 - appraised values of objects on loan to museum;
 - names of anonymous donors or lenders;
 - terms of gift agreements;
 - contracts with donors or other employees

B PERSONAL COLLECTING

- 1 *Acquisitions.* Many museums allow curators to collect art for their personal enjoyment, which promotes connoisseurship and enhances professional knowledge.²² However, the acquisition, maintenance, and management of a personal collection by a curator can create a perceived conflict of interest. Extreme discretion is required whenever a curator collects objects similar to those collected by the museum. Curators need to ensure that no conflict or perceived conflict of interest arises between themselves and the museum and that they are not in a position of competing with their employer for any acquisition.

Examples of potential conflicts or perceived conflicts of interest include the following:

- taking advantage of one's museum affiliation to promote personal collecting or personal gain;
- competing with the museum in an area of collecting;
- conserving, researching, and storing one's personal collection (during business hours) without written permission of director or his designee.

Some museums do not allow curators (or their family members) knowingly to purchase any object deaccessioned by the museum.²³ In the interests of transparency and to avoid any perceived conflict of interest, curators who actively collect works of art or cultural artifacts may choose to provide their museum with an inventory of their collections at the time of employment.²⁴ This inventory can then be updated periodically to avoid any perception of conflict of interest.²⁵ Many museums do not prohibit curatorial collecting if the works are inherited or have been acquired prior to employment.²⁶

2 *Conservation/storage.* Some museums allow curators to bring works of art to the museum for private conservation as long as the work does not encroach upon or otherwise restrict the museum's storage or workspace.²⁷ Other museums discourage curators from bringing in works from their personal collection to be stored or conserved at the museum, or require advance approval from the director before undertaking such an action.²⁸

3 *Loans to museum.* In some museums, any loan to the museum by a curator must be credited anonymously in exhibitions and publications. Other museums prefer the transparency of having the curator's name appear in the credit line.²⁹

4 *Sales to museum.* Some museums allow curators to sell works from their personal collection as long as the curator gives the museum the first opportunity to purchase the object at fair market price within a reasonable time.³⁰ For some museums, it is sufficient that curators advise them when an object in the curator's collection is being offered for public sale.³¹

Other museums discourage altogether the sale of works to the museum, by requiring that works of art be presented for sale to the museum at a price substantially below fair market value.³² Some museums request that curators sell through public auction rather than through a dealer.³³

5 *Dealing.* Most museums recognize a distinction between dealing (buying and selling for personal profit) and the occasional sales intended to upgrade a personal collection. It is strongly recommended that curators not act as dealers, be employed by dealers, or retain an interest in a dealership.³⁴ In general, in all cases where a potential conflict of interest concerning art dealing, auctions, and collecting might arise, it is recommended that curators keep a record of transactions in their professional file.

C EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENTS, EMPLOYMENT, AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Curators engaged in outside activities similar to those that they perform at their own museum are perceived to be representatives of their museum, even though the outside work may be entirely independent of that museum. For that reason, curators may want to obtain written approval from their director or department head before accepting outside employment, exhibition projects, or consultancies, or before making public statements.³⁵ Outside employment should not be accepted if it creates a conflict of interest or even the appearance of a conflict of interest with the museum's policy on outside employment.³⁶ If the museum does not have such a policy, curators should encourage administrators to put one in place.³⁷

1 *Outside employment.* Outside employment is defined as work, including self-employment and paid consulting, that is similar or related to work a curator does for his or her museum employer and for which remuneration or non-monetary compensation (or both) is received.³⁸ Many museums encourage curators to engage in activities related to their profession such as consulting,

serving on committees or juries for art exhibitions or competitions, lecturing, teaching, research, and writing books or articles, as these contribute to the museum's reputation as well as to the individual's professional development.³⁹

Most museums have rules regarding employment outside the workplace. Most museums require advance approval from a curator's supervisor before one may engage in any activity related to his or her work at the museum.⁴⁰ In principle, all scholarly work is to be encouraged, though not at the expense of a curator's ongoing responsibilities at the museum where he or she is employed.⁴¹

2 *Public statements.* A museum's department of marketing and communications usually has the sole authority to speak publicly for the museum. In most museums, curators are asked to refer queries from the press, television, or radio representatives to the marketing and communications department.

3 *Lobbying.* Curators may periodically be called upon by the museum to make contact with members of city, county, state, or federal legislative bodies and other government officials to set forth and advocate for the museum's positions on issues. Curators acting in this capacity are expected to abide by all applicable laws at all times. Individuals who attempt to influence any legislative, executive, or other governmental action, official, or employee on behalf of the museum may be required to register as lobbyists and file certain reports concerning their activities. To ensure full compliance with these laws and policies, it is expected that no curator will engage in lobbying without authorization from the museum director.

Conclusions

In all activities and statements, curators need to disclose whether they are acting or speaking for their museum, their professional affiliated associations, or solely for themselves. They should not represent, or appear to represent, their museums or their associations without a mandate to do so.

Some museums devise guidelines to help curators better evaluate a situation and decide on a correct course of action. The following guidelines⁴² are useful in arriving at a satisfactory answer or decision:

- Is the action consistent with museum practices?
- Could the action give the appearance of impropriety?
- Will the action bring discredit to the museum, its officers, its trustees, or its employees in the event of public disclosure?
- Is the action defensible to the curator's supervisor, the museum's officers, trustees, or employees, or the general public?
- Does the action meet the curator's personal code of behavior?

Sources Cited

| | |
|-------|---|
| AAM | <i>Professional Code of Ethics [for Curators]</i> (from <i>Museum News</i> , February 1993, 40) |
| AAMD | <i>Association of Art Museum Directors "A Code of Ethics for Art Museum Directors"</i> (revised 2001) |
| Hood | <i>Hood Museum of Art Code of Ethics</i> (undated). |
| LACMA | <i>Los Angeles County Museum of Art: Ethics Policy</i> (undated; after 1993) |
| MMA | <i>The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Ethics Code</i> (Draft November 8, 2006) |
| MFAB | <i>Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Staff Guidelines for Professional Practice</i> (Revised by the Board of Trustees, October 24, 2002) |
| MoMA | <i>Code of Conduct for The Museum of Modern Art</i> (undated) |
| NGA | <i>Expert Opinion for the General Public with Respect to Works of Art</i> (National Gallery of Art Circular No. 35) |
| NGC | <i>National Gallery of Canada: Code of Ethics for Employees</i> (draft June 27, 1994) |

Notes

- 1 For the purposes of consistency, the term “museum” is used throughout this document to refer both to museums and to other arts institutions that employ art curators.
- 2 For convenience, the term “director” is used herein to designate the appropriate museum authority (e.g., department head, chief curator, deputy director).
- 3 Adapted from The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Curatorial Forum Statement on intellectual property.
- 4 Presenting Works by Living Artists and Works in New Media
 - A) Living Artists: curators who work directly with living artists during exhibition planning and development must prepare detailed notes about the appropriate presentation of all works of art.
 - B) New Media: Additionally, curators who work with new forms of media must note the appropriate procedures for presenting works of art. For example, film curators are increasingly faced with the philosophical conundrum of whether to transfer works originally made on celluloid to digital-based mediums for exhibitions in galleries and theaters, and also whether to permit excerpts of moving-image works to be projected as representative of complete works of art.
- 5 Regarding the important relationship between curators and educators, see *The Curator’s Role and Relationship to Particular Constituencies* section B, page 12.
- 6 NGA. In some museums, internships and intern programs are administered by the education division, but with the input of curators in the selection of interns on a competitive basis and their supervision.
- 7 In offering expert advice, most museums require curators to provide multiple references for reputable suppliers or sources, where possible, to avoid the appearance of an official endorsement or favoritism (LACMA, MFAB). Some museums require curators to obtain prior approval from their director before consulting or advising, whether orally or in writing. Some museums allow curators to be compensated for offering expert advice if it is authorized by the director as “scholarly activity,” that is, outside museum working hours and the scope of one’s regular employment.
- 8 NGC. Some museums allow curators to provide this kind of information freely on an oral basis, but when making a formal, written statement, the opinion must be accompanied by the museum’s disclaimer form or approved by the director (LACMA). Museums only rarely allow curators to authenticate works for compensation. Curators should consult museum policy in all cases; where guidelines for consulting activities or for authentication are absent, curators should encourage their formulation to avoid any perception of conflict of interest (MMA).
- 9 LACMA, MMA.
- 10 Hood.
- 11 MFAB.
- 12 MFAB.
- 13 AAM.
- 14 MMA, MoMA. Hood explicitly prohibits curators from accepting such gifts. Some museums prohibit curators from accepting sales commissions or other considerations, including personal gifts relating to the purchase, display, or sale of art by the museum for which they work (NGC). Others allow curators to accept stipends with the director’s prior approval (MMA).
- 15 LACMA.
- 16 Adapted from Hood (which states that curators must not do so).

- ¹⁷ Federal and state laws explicitly prohibit giving a gratuity to a government employee in connection with a business transaction.
- ¹⁸ MoMA. Curators who maintain a working relationship with dealers or auction houses should discuss the allowability of accepting gifts (including offers of outside employment or other advantageous arrangements, loans, or other favors) with the director. Regardless of value, gifts should not be accepted if they seem to imply a quid pro quo (Hood).
- ¹⁹ Accepting advance payment or reimbursement for per diem expenses, however, raises different issues, which should be discussed with the director.
- ²⁰ Adapted from Hood (which states that curators must not do so).
- ²¹ LACMA, MFAB.
- ²² Some museums allow curators to collect in any area outside their area of expertise (Hood). Others have no such restrictions, but require that curators inform the director of their intention to purchase a work of art and provide the director with documentation regarding the purchase.
- ²³ MoMA. Some museums allow curators to purchase deaccessioned objects as long as these objects are outside of the curator's area of expertise (Hood). Still other museums allow purchase of deaccessioned objects after one year of the object's deaccession (LACMA).
- ²⁴ MFAB.
- ²⁵ AAM.
- ²⁶ NGC.
- ²⁷ MMA.
- ²⁸ Hood.
- ²⁹ MFAB.
- ³⁰ MMA.
- ³¹ NGA. Curators are strongly discouraged from selling objects in their collection to a third party at a lower price than agreed upon when presenting it to their museum (MMA).
- ³² MoMA.
- ³³ AAM.
- ³⁴ AAM, MFAB, Hood. Curators should recognize the risk of perceived conflicts of interest when negotiating personally with a dealer with whom they conduct business on behalf of the museum (AAM). Some museums require that curators obtain prior permission for any remuneration for services that they provide. Other museums do not allow curators to write about objects offered for sale (NGA).
- ³⁵ This is especially true when curators are engaged in projects or situations that put at risk the professional integrity of the curator or the reputation of the museum (NGC, MoMA).
- ³⁶ MMA.
- ³⁷ AAM.
- ³⁸ Hood, MoMA.
- ³⁹ MMA, NGA. Some museums encourage teaching at an institution of higher learning as long as the commitment does not extend beyond one course per semester, subject to the museum director's approval. Some museums, however, require that teaching be done outside working hours and not on museum premises (unless prior approval by the director is obtained). Some museum guidelines state that curators may lecture during working hours as long as they take paid leave for those hours, but do not restrict lecturing or teaching outside of working hours. (MoMA).
- ⁴⁰ Hood. If curators undertake outside employment for compensation while traveling at the museum's expense, permission should be obtained, preferably in writing, to avoid the perception of conflicts of interest.
- ⁴¹ Potential conflicts of interest include providing materials, equipment, services, or making loans of works of art on one museum's behalf while employed by another museum, including independent exhibition-generating organizations (LACMA, MFAB).
- ⁴² MoMA.



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