

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY COLLECTION POLICY

I. INTRODUCTION

This document establishes policies and guidelines for acquiring materials for the collections, sets forth policies for the use of the collections, outlines the ethical and legal responsibilities of the Museum and its staff with respect to the collections, and defines the circumstances and procedures by which objects shall be eliminated from the collections. This policy statement supersedes all previous documents on collection policies.

- A. The Natural History Museum is a department of the County of Los Angeles. The County is administered by a five-member Board of Supervisors elected by popular vote and charged with the administration of the Los Angeles County government. This elected Board appoints a 15-member Board of Governors to oversee the general operation of the Museum and to serve as the governing board for County collection artifacts under the general supervision of the Board of Supervisors. The President/Director is appointed by the Board of Governors with the approval of the Board of Supervisors and is responsible for the administration and operation of the Museum.

In addition to Los Angeles County funding, the programs of the Museum are supported by a non-profit California corporation, the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Foundation, with a self-elected Board of Trustees serving as the governing board for Foundation collections. In carrying out its primary purpose of support to the Natural History Museum, the Foundation employs additional staff to solicit, receive, and distribute funds, to conduct research, curate, and care for collections, and to purchase and receive donations of collection objects that are held in public trust. The Foundation also creates and manages various support groups for the Museum. These objects, in addition to the objects owned by the County, comprise the collections of the Natural History Museum.

The Research and Collections Branch of the Museum is led by an appointed Deputy Director. Only the Branch of Research and Collections is involved in the curation of collections. This branch is further subdivided into disciplinary categories called Divisions, Departments, and Sections.

For purposes of this document, the Museum is defined as the parent institution in Exposition Park and in all present and future satellite facilities. All transactions referred to in this document require approval within the administrative hierarchy, even when not specifically stated. These policies pertain to collections of both the County of Los Angeles and the Foundation, and all objects held by the Museum, whether for research, education, or exhibit

purposes. The term “staff” refers to all employees of the County, the Board of Governors, the Foundation, museum support groups, and the members of their respective boards.

- B. As the professional practices vary considerably within the disciplines represented by the Museum staff, specific disciplinary or sectional collection policies are a necessary complement to this document. These sectional policies shall be consistent with the policies stated below. Any exceptions must have the approval of the Museum President/Director and shall be listed in future, updated versions of this document.

II. MISSION OF THE MUSEUM

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County exists to advance knowledge and to enable people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests to appreciate their natural and cultural heritage. The Museum assembles, conserves, interprets, and holds in trust collections of irreplaceable objects from nature and human history. These collections reveal the history of the Earth and the evolution and diversity of life and culture. They sustain programs of research, exhibits, education, and publication.

III. NATURE OF THE COLLECTIONS

- A. The collections of the Natural History Museum are here defined as the biological, geological, anthropological, and historical objects acquired and conserved because of their scientific and historical significance and their educational value. As used in this document, the term “object” shall pertain to all collection materials including, but not restricted to, specimens, artifacts, photographs, paintings, drawings, archival and library material, field records, collection records, and exhibits.
- B. Collections are managed by staff members who are specialists in a field related to the collection in their care and are responsible for all aspects of curation and maintenance of that collection, including acquisition and disposal, conservation, interpretation, exhibition, access, research, and publication.

IV. CODE OF ETHICS

- A. Activities that conflict with staff responsibilities or cause staff members to favor outside interests over those of their institution must be avoided. Because the prime responsibilities of the Museum are to maintain objects in the public trust commensurate with adequate safety, to make objects available for study, to employ objects in education, and to conduct research, the Museum requires its staff:
 - 1. to act ethically and legally in collecting, acquiring, reproducing, lending,

and disposing of objects;

2. to discourage unethical, illegal, and destructive practices with respect to collecting, acquiring, storing, reproducing, displaying, transporting, and trafficking in objects;
 3. to refrain from providing appraisals for any objects;
 4. to refrain during their tenure of Museum employment from amassing or adding to personal collections that overlap in scope with those of the museum (collections acquired through family inheritance are exempt);
 5. to provide the Museum with an inventory of any Museum-related personal collections at the time of employment and to update this inventory to include any new acquisitions for which an exemption to Rule 4 above has been granted after employment; and,
 6. to abide by the Museum's Code of Ethics as adopted by its governing boards, the Code of Ethics of the County, the recommendations set forth in the 1993 Museum Ethics Report, published by the American Association of Museums in its Conflict of Interest Code adopted by the Museum in December 1976, and the UNESCO Convention of 1971.
- B. All participants in Museum-sponsored fieldwork should be aware that acquisitions during the trip, whether part of the stated purpose of the trip or not, are the property of the Museum and must be placed at the disposal of the appropriate curator for possible accession into a Museum collection.
- C. If an appraisal is supplied to the Museum by the donor, the value may be recorded with the accession information. Recording this appraisal does not imply its validation by the Museum.

For income-tax purposes, the Registrar's Office will confirm receipt of donations by signing IRS forms after the appraisal section has been completed and signed by the donor's appraiser.

V. ACQUISITION OF OBJECTS FOR MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

- A. Objects shall not be accepted or acquired for Museum collections unless:

1. the objects are consistent with the purposes and activities of the Museum;
 2. the Museum can provide for the storage, protection, and preservation of the objects under conditions that insure their availability in keeping with professional standards of museum conservation;
 3. it is intended that the objects shall remain in the collections as long as they remain useful for the purposes of the Museum;
 4. the Museum can acquire valid and legal title to them effective in the United States and in the country of origin, if different;
 5. the Museum can be assured that they were not collected or recovered under circumstances that would support or encourage irresponsible damage to, or destruction of biota, collecting sites, cultural monuments, or human burial places (the Museum may accept objects that have been confiscated by governmental authorities and subsequently offered to the Museum); and,
 6. free-and-clear title, without restrictions as to use, reproduction, or future disposition, can be obtained, and a legal instrument of conveyance, setting forth an adequate description of the objects and the precise conditions of transfer, signed by the donor or seller and by an authorized Museum representative, can be placed on file in the Museum Registrar's office. (If, under rare conditions, objects are accepted with restrictions or limitations, then such conditions must be approved by the Deputy Director for Research and Collections and the President/Director, and must be stated clearly in the instrument of conveyance, which is to be made part of the accession records for the objects. This policy shall be strictly observed by the Museum.)
- B. When considering receipt of a gift or purchase, the circumstances of the transaction, the reputation of the seller or donor, and the available knowledge of the object's origin shall leave no doubt that valid and legal title can be transferred to the Museum. In complying with these provisions, staff should consult with colleagues in their own institution and discipline to the degree advisable based on the significance of the acquisition and the circumstances of the transaction. In doubtful cases, staff will abide by the advice of the Museum's legal counsel.
- C. All objects acquired for the collections shall be documented in the Museum Registrar's Office using standards that are normal to the pertinent discipline. These

records shall include the evidence that has been gathered to establish the appropriateness of the acquisition within the context of the above.

- D. Copies or reproductions of original material acquired for display or research purposes shall not be acquired or reproduced without the sanction of the institution in which the original material is housed.
- E. All objects/specimens acquired through donations, purchase, field trips, or exchanges should be assigned an in-house insurance value to insure adequate documentation in the event of theft, damage, or other loss. Items that are purchased will be insured at the purchase price unless a higher insurance value is assigned by the appropriate curator.
- F. From time to time, the Museum wishes to acquire material for research, exhibit, or education purposes that the Museum does not intend to hold in its collections indefinitely. For instance, the Museum may intend to subject material to destructive analysis or to use for educational or exhibit purposes with the expectation that the material will deteriorate through use and become unsuitable for continued stewardship. The Museum may accept any such material without accessioning it into its permanent collections, provided that appropriate documentation shall be prepared by the Registrar's Office formally accepting the material on behalf of the Museum. The documentation shall include the section that will maintain responsibility for care and use of the material and shall be approved by the Deputy Director for Research and Collections and, if intended for educational or exhibits purposes, by the Chief of Education or Chief of Exhibits, as the case may be.
- G. When such non-accessioned material no longer is useful to the Museum, the responsible section shall recommend for approval by the Deputy Director the appropriate disposition, with the documentation retained by the Registrar and a copy retained by the responsible section. Unless the object was subjected to destructive analysis pursuant to prior approval, the non-accessioned material must be disposed of in the same manner as is permitted for accessioned artifacts.
- H. Library material that is not unusually rare or valuable (either economically or for the long-term purposes of the Museum) may be accepted by the Museum without accession into the collection. Such library material may be disposed of in accordance with standard practice for research libraries, provided that complete records be kept of all transactions, and that the restrictions on transactions with individuals associated with the Museum apply to such material. Unusually rare or valuable library material will be accessioned into the Museum's collections in the same manner as other artifacts.

VI. DEACCESSION AND DISPOSAL OF OBJECTS FROM THE COLLECTIONS

- A. Accessioned objects in the collections will be retained permanently if they continue to be relevant and useful to the purposes and activities of the Museum and if they can be properly stored, preserved, and used. Deaccessioning of objects may be considered when these conditions no longer prevail.
- B. Accessioned objects in the collections may be deaccessioned only with the approval of the appropriate curator and the Deputy Director for Research and Collections, and upon the subsequent approval of the Director in accordance with policies approved by the appropriate governing board.
- C. When disposing of deaccessioned objects, the Museum shall insure that the manner of disposition is in the best interests of the Museum, the public it serves, the public trust it represents in maintaining the collections, and the scholarly or cultural communities of which it forms a part.
 - 1. Consideration will be given to returning to the community, state, or nation objects that are part of the historical, cultural, or scientific heritage of the community, state, or nation.
 - 2. Consideration will be given to placing the objects, through exchange, in another institution wherein they may serve the purpose for which they initially were acquired.
 - 3. No gifts shall be made of property held in the public trust.
 - 4. No exchanges shall be made with an individual.
 - 5. No private sales shall be made to individuals. Any objects from the collection to be sold must be advertised at public auction in the public marketplace in a manner that will best protect the interests, objectives, and legal status of the Museum. Objects will not be given or sold privately to employees of the institution, to officers, to members of the governing authority, or to their representatives.
 - 6. Proceeds of all sales of objects will be used only to obtain additional objects or the conservation of existing objects in the collection and cannot be used to subsidize the operation of the Museum.

7. All funds derived from the sale of objects shall be expended for the discipline in which they were catalogued.
- D. Before disposing of any objects from the collections, reasonable effort will be made to ascertain that the Museum is free to do so. Where restrictions as to use or disposition of the objects under question are found to apply, the Museum shall act as follows:
1. mandatory restrictions shall be strictly observed unless deviation from their terms is authorized by a court of competent jurisdiction; and,
 2. if there is any question as to the intent or force of restrictions, the Museum shall seek the advice of legal counsel.
- E. A record of the conditions and circumstances under which objects are deaccessioned and disposed of shall be made and retained as part of the Museum's permanent register. Record shall also be kept in the pertinent section catalogue.

VII. LOANS

A. Incoming Loans

Incoming loans shall be accepted only for purposes of exhibition or research. Indefinite or long-term loans shall be accepted only when recommended by the staff, approved by the Deputy Director for Research and Collections, and authorized by the President/Director. These loans must involve important objects that would otherwise be subject to loss or are required for Museum programs. The Museum cannot store, on behalf of others, materials that are not required for exhibition or ongoing research or promised donation. Materials lent to the Museum on the understanding that they will ultimately be donated to the collections must be accompanied by a written binding declaration of the lender's intent to this effect. Paragraphs 1, 2, and 5 in Section V(A) above regarding legal and ethical acquisitions policies shall apply to all incoming loans.

B. Outgoing Loans

The Museum lends objects to qualified institutions for scholarly research and exhibition subject to policies and practices consistent within each section. The following shall pertain to all loans:

1. Objects shall not be lent to individuals except under special circumstances and with the approval of the President/Director. Before lending to individuals, the curator in charge must make every effort to seek an institutional affiliation or

endorsement for the person. If an affiliation is impossible to establish, then written reasons must be stated with the loan form.

2. Objects requested by students or associates will require faculty or institutional endorsement and will be considered the direct responsibility of the faculty member or institutional representative endorsing the request.
3. Loans will not be transferred by the borrower to any other institution or individual without prior approval.
4. The maximum duration of most loans shall be one year, but shall be subject to renewal. Longer term loans may be approved by the President/Director at the recommendation of the Deputy Director for Research and Collections.
5. Materials placed on loan by the Museum will be assigned an insurance value prior to shipment.

VIII. USE OF COLLECTIONS

A. Access to Collections

The collections shall be accessible for research and study by responsible investigators, subject to procedures necessary to safeguard the objects, and to restrictions imposed by limitations of exhibition requirement, availability of study space and facilities, and availability of appropriate curatorial staff as determined by the curator in charge of the collection.

Access to collections or collection records can be denied if such access may create a substantial risk of harm, theft, or destruction of such objects or of the area or place where the objects originated.

B. Exhibitions

The Museum places original, reconstructed, and duplicated objects from the collections on public exhibition. These objects remain the responsibility of the curatorial discipline from which they originated, and are treated in a manner consistent with the policies stated above. Objects may be physically removed from exhibition only upon notification and under oversight of the responsible curator and Deputy Director for Research and Collections in consultation with the Chief of the Exhibits Division.

C. Educational Use of Objects

At the discretion of the responsible curator and the Deputy Director for Research and Collections, collections may be made available for educational movies, filmstrips, electronic media, or still photography for scholarly publications.

D. Commercial Use of Objects

At the discretion of the responsible curator and with administrative approval, objects or their images may be made available for reproduction or replication for commercial use. The curator responsible for the object(s) and the Deputy Director for Research and Collections, and other professionals as conditions may dictate, shall be the judge(s) of quality control, selection, and marketing with the approval of the President/Director. Such commercial use shall be for the benefit of the collections and consistent with this collection policy. Copyright for reproduction of Foundation collection objects will remain the property of the Foundation.

IX. PUBLIC DOMAIN

- A. This policy will be reviewed by the Museum staff as required so as to maintain an effective collection policy. Changes must be approved by the President/Director and adopted by the Board of Governors and the Board of Trustees.

These written statements of the collections policies of the Natural History Museum, which have been approved and adopted by the Board of Governors and the Board of Trustees, will be made available to donors, collection users, and other appropriate persons.