

Corning Museum of Glass



March 17, 2015

Cultural Property Advisory Committee
Cultural Heritage Center (ECA/P/C)
SA-5, Fifth Floor C2
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20522-05C2

Dear Members of the Committee:

My name is Karol Wight; I am the President and Executive Director of the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York. The museum, which was founded in 1951 and has over 50,000 objects, cares for and displays the world's best collection of art and historical glass going back more than 3,500 years.

Prior to joining Corning, I was senior curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, California, where I was actively engaged in the return of cultural assets from the Getty's collection to Italy and Sicily. I was also intimately engaged with the formulation of the agreement for cultural collaboration between the Republic of Italy and the Getty Museum, as well as the subsequent cultural agreement between Sicily and the Getty Museum. I worked to formulate the cultural exchanges that were outlined in those documents, exchanges that included exhibitions of works from Italian and Sicilian museums, conservation projects, publications, and other scholarly exchanges. This involved numerous trips to museums in Italy and Sicily to discuss potential projects with our Italian and Sicilian colleagues, and to agree to work together on them.

Today, I present on behalf of the Corning Museum of Glass and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), of which I am a member. My personal experience with Italy has been long and fruitful and I would like to see the Italian spirit of generosity and cooperation, which I have enjoyed, expanded to a larger part of the art museum community.

In preparation for this meeting, the AAMD surveyed its members about their experiences and interactions with Italian museums and the Italian government. Twenty-four AAMD museums responded to the Italian survey, they ranged from large to mid-sized. Of those 24:

- Only four – all of which had previously restituted works to Italy – appear to have received long-term loans of antiquities.
- Twenty of the 24 indicated an interest in having long-term loans, but had never requested them leading us to believe that they did not know how or where to start the process.

In the interest of those 20 and other similarly situated members of the AAMD who did not respond to the survey, I address my comments, which stem from Article II of the 2011 Memorandum of Understanding with Italy. Article II provides in part:

E. The Government of the United States of America recognizes that the Government of the Republic of Italy permits the interchange of archaeological materials for cultural, exhibition, educational and scientific purposes to enable widespread public appreciation of and legal access to Italy's rich cultural heritage. The Government of the Republic of Italy and the Government of the United States of America agree to encourage further interchange through:

1. entering into discussions about how to increase the number and overall length of long-term loans of objects of archaeological or artistic interest for research and educational purposes, agreed upon, on a case by case basis, by American and Italian museums or similar institutions, recognizing the spirit of goodwill that exists between cultural institutions in both countries. . . .

F. The Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Italy shall use their best efforts to facilitate appropriate contacts among U.S. and Italian museums and institutions for the development of increased and extended loans of Italy's archeological cultural patrimony to U.S. museums.

Unfortunately, despite many good intentions by all those concerned, the years since Article II was written have not resulted in any increase in the number or length of long-term loans. Temporary, or exhibition, loans also remain difficult on a number of levels. To achieve these goals, a concerted, focused effort is necessary. My comments address concrete steps that should help and I hope these suggestions will be incorporated in a revised Article II.

Suggestions for Encouraging Temporary and Long-Term Loans from Italy

1. Steps that could be taken by the Italian government and its museums that could dramatically facilitate the “appropriate contacts” mentioned in the 2011 MOU for both temporary and long-term loans include the following:
 - In order to increase and facilitate requests for loans, Italian museums that have the capacity should list works in their storerooms that could be available for either long-term or exhibition loans. The lists could be placed on an Italian Cultural Ministry web site and publicized through the Department of State and through U.S. cultural organizations, such as AAMD.

To enable American museums to request loans from Italian museums more easily, an information section on the Ministero website would be very helpful so that curators fully

understand and can follow the proper process and recommended guidelines for making such loan requests.

2. If American museums are to benefit from the generosity of Italians in sharing their culture, it must be cost effective for the American museums. This is not limited just to the direct expenses associated with loans, about which I believe others will speak, but as importantly about the amount of time a work or works can be out of Italy.

- Currently loans for temporary exhibitions are limited to 12 months. For a museum to spend the time and money to organize a temporary exhibition from museums in Italy, the exhibition must often be able to travel to several venues in the United States. Assuming an exhibition travels to a minimum of three venues, including the organizing museum, and each venue has the exhibition on view for three months, that is nine months out of the 12, leaving only three months for the exhibition to move from Italy to the United States, then from place to place, to be installed, deinstalled, packed and shipped to the next venue and returned to Italy. In order for that to work, the timing must be perfect, which it almost never is.

I suggest temporary exhibitions be available to U.S. museums for up to 24 months. The extended time period, coupled with outreach from the Italian museums to their U.S. counterparts, would bring to a larger American audience an experience with the beauties and mysteries of Italian culture.

- Long-term loans are currently limited to four years. This also creates a disincentive for many American museums, which indicated that, for them, long-term loans of 5, 10 or 20 years would be required. Long-term loans of a single object or two are highly sought after by U.S. museums as a way of adding a new and different dimension to their permanent collections. But fully utilizing long-term loans requires a significant amount of time to prepare educational materials, programming for the general public and publicity and information about the loan.

I suggest long-term loans be permitted for at least five years, renewable for an additional five years.

3. Another possibility for enhanced collaboration exists in the area of long-term loans and conservation. Some museums, including those on university campuses, have access to conservation and restoration laboratories. Others have universities in their areas that have such facilities available. These museums could provide conservation and/or restoration work on loaned objects, but the term of the loan must be long enough to allow for the conservation or restoration work, display and study. Only then will U.S. museums be interested in such exchange.

The AAMD is willing to provide the Department of State/Italian Cultural Ministry with contact information for mid-sized museums and/or university art museums that are

interested in long-term loans and can provide such services if the Cultural Ministry is interested in pursuing this option.

These are just some ideas for enhancing a major goal of the Memorandum of Understanding – cultural exchange – but especially so in the context of our agreement with Italy. I hope others will bring forth constructive suggestions and that the Committee will seriously explore with our Italian colleagues ways to improve collaboration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karol Nyls". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.