

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Honduras
Statement
to Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC)
by Dorie Reents-Budet, Ph.D.**

October 30, 2013

Introduction

I have been in the field of Pre-Columbian art and culture history since beginning graduate school in 1975 at La Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, México. Since 1977 I have conducted archaeological, art historical, and museum research in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Peru. The majority of my field research has been done in my capacity as the art historian for the Maya Ceramics Project, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, a multi-disciplinary project combining art history, archaeology, and nuclear chemistry.

Currently I am curator of art of the ancient Americas, Museum of Fine Arts Boston (since 1999). Previously, I was curator of Pre-Columbian art at Duke University Museum of Art (1988-1996). Since 1996 I have held consulting curatorial positions at the Walters Art Museum (Baltimore), Mint Museum of Art (Charlotte, NC), Dayton Art Institute, Denver Art Museum, Weatherspoon Gallery (University of North Carolina at Greensboro), Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art (Toronto), Michael C. Carlos Museum (Emory University), the visitors centers at Tikal and Quiriguá (Guatemala), and Casa K'inich (Copán, Honduras).

I have held faculty positions as the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (1998-1999), Duke University (1988-1996), University of California at Santa Barbara (1987-1988), and The Johns Hopkins University (1986-1987). My educational background includes a Bachelor's of Fine Arts from the University of Northern Colorado (1974), graduate studies in archaeology at the Universidad de las Américas, Cholula, Pue., México (1975-76), Master's degree in anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin (1980), and a Doctor of Philosophy in art history also from the University of Texas at Austin (1985).

Today I speak on behalf of the Association of Art Museum Directors and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Joint Research and Museum Projects with Honduran National Institutions and Honduran Non-Governmental Organizations

I have collaborated with Honduran and international research projects in Honduras since 1995. These include:

- Chemical analysis of archaeological ceramics from the national collections, in my capacity as the art historian for The Maya Ceramics Project, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. 1995-2012.

- Curator for Casa K'ínich, the children's museum, Copán Ruinas; a project of La Asociación Copán/The Copán Maya Foundation. Project members were from Honduras and the United States. 1999-2010.
- Co-author of "El Manual de Monumentos de Copán" (www.mesoweb.org). Co-authors include specialists from Honduras, Australia, and Hungary. 2008-2010.

During these projects, I encountered many well-intentioned, intelligent, and ambitious individuals. In all instances, however, the social, economic, and political hurdles one encounters on a daily basis in Honduras impede their best efforts. In addition, the lack of educational and professional development opportunities obstructs advancement, which in turn, deters national expansion.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Honduras

I urge the CPAC to support the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding requested by the Government of the Republic of Honduras. The existing MOU has assisted Honduras in its valiant efforts to protect and preserve the country's cultural heritage. Poverty, lack of education, unchecked development, political and social corruption, and the infiltration of international drug cartels are wreaking havoc on civil society in Honduras. Collateral damage is being done to the nation's cultural heritage and increasingly to the educational and professional opportunities for Hondurans.

In the Copán Valley, home to Copán, one of four capitals of the ancient Maya and a prime focus of Honduras' tourism industry, the lack of educational and professional advancement opportunities, poverty, and the easy riches of drug traffickers gravely hinder local efforts to preserve cultural heritage. There are many well-intentioned, honest, and hard-working Hondurans trying to better their country for the benefit of all. But they face considerable difficulties on the political, economic, and social fronts. External endeavors such as the MOU are valuable because they build bridges to an international network of like-minded colleagues, financial and logistical support, and specialized assistance not available in Honduras.

In spite of the social upheaval, the MOU has been helpful; it assisted Licenciada Eva Martínez, director of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH), and Dr. Loa Traxler, curator for the exhibition for *Lords of Time: The Maya and 2012* (University Museum, University of Pennsylvania) with securing the loans of priceless national treasures from Honduras. The MOU also has been of assistance to the Asociación Copán in securing international funding for its myriad archaeological and natural resources preservation projects in the Copán Valley.

Experiences with Art/Artifact Loan Requests from Honduras

I have direct experience with making loan requests for artifacts from the archaeological collections of Honduras for three nationally-touring exhibitions:

- 1992-1994 for *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period* (Duke University Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art)
- 2002-2005 for *Lords of Creation: The Origins of Sacred Maya Kingship* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art).
- 2010-2012 for *Lords of Time: The Maya and 2012*, organized by Dr. Loa Traxler of The University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania.

The *Painting the Maya Universe* request was not successful because, because, in addition to the fact that there was no official response to my loan request from the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (the IHAH), located in Tegucigalpa, I lacked close personal connections with Honduran colleagues who could intervene on our behalf to solicit a response.

Subsequently, the request for the *Lords of Creation* exhibition was successful because of the direct intervention by Honduran colleagues and influential Honduran friends. We were allowed to borrow from the collections in storage at the Centro Regional de Investigaciones Arqueológicas (CRIA), Copán Ruinas (the IHAH's official storage facility in the region), but were unsuccessful in procuring loans from the displays in Copán's municipal museum and a temporary installation in Tegucigalpa.

The successful loan request hinged on my making a personal presentation to the citizens of the town of Copán Ruinas, the municipality located on the edge of the archaeological site of Copán. I discussed the exhibit's themes and presented our "wish list" of artworks chosen to illustrate the themes. I also showcased the U.S. museums where the exhibit would be presented (LACMA, Dallas Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum), and hosted a question-and-answer period. The personal presentation was necessary because of an on-going disagreement between some citizens and the IHAH/the Honduran government concerning international loans of national patrimony. The citizens' disagreement was (and continues to be) not related to issues concerning object safety or the exhibition projects *per se* but instead centers on the fact that the local community wants control over all artifacts to address a variety of long-standing disputes between it and the national authorities. These include:

- Citizens of the municipality of Copán Ruinas demand equal say in whether international loans are allowed from the collections housed at the CRIA and in the municipal museum.
- Citizens demand assurance that all artifacts will be returned to Copán --in years, if not decades, past some international loans remained in Tegucigalpa at the end of the exhibition.
- Citizens of Copán Ruinas demand sole control over the archaeological site of Copán because they say all proceeds from ticket sales go to Tegucigalpa and the municipality never receives any of the profits.
- Artifacts loaned to international exhibitions discourage tourists from coming to Copán Ruinas (and supporting the local economy) because they can see the great works of art in their local museum.

I also was on the advisory committee for the exhibition *Lords of Time: The Maya and 2012*. Dr. Traxler, who excavated at Copán for more than 15 years, encountered similar loan request problems. Further, once her loan request was formalized by the IHAH, its director requested assistance from Dr. Traxler to establish insurance valuations because the IHAH staff lacked the resources and knowledge to provide accurate values. As a member of the advisory committee and its primary art museum professional, I provided informal values based on the then-current art market. I also advised Dr. Traxler to hire an independent appraiser given my museum experiences and understanding of the insurance guidelines of the American Alliance of Museums (formerly American Association of Museums) and insurance industry itself. The Honduran government accepted the valuations because of the rigorousness of the process which was confirmed by Lica. Martínez.

Recommendations for Additional Assistance to Honduras

- Provide professional development opportunities for Honduran nationals in museum practices including collections management, art/artifact conservation, art/artifact exhibition design and installation.
- Encourage Honduras to allow art loans for five-year periods, with the possibility of renewal.
- Encourage Honduras to develop a more streamlined international loan request process which includes reasonable local input.
- Cooperatively, with other federal government agencies, address the United States' drug problem and further assist Honduras' efforts to alleviate the drug cartels' strangle-hold on the country.