



THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

ETHICS POLICY

Board-approved: 2020.12.16
Updated:
Updated:
Updated:

Table of Contents

1. Overview

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Statement of Purpose
- 1.3 The Museum in Society

2. Collections

- 2.1 Overview
- 2.2 Acquisition and Accession Process
 - 2.2.1 Criteria for Acquisition
 - 2.2.2 Criteria for Accession
- 2.3 Acquisition Transactions
 - 2.3.1 Gifts
 - 2.3.2 Purchases
 - 2.3.3 Bequests
 - 2.3.4 Permanent Joint Ownership
- 2.4 Documentation and Provenance

3. Programs

4. Code of Conduct for Trustees, Staff, and Volunteers

- 4.1 General Department
- 4.2 Confidentiality
- 4.3 Conflicts of Interest
- 4.4 Responsibilities to Collections and Other Museum Property
- 4.5 Outside Employment
- 4.6 Gifts, Favors, Discounts, and Dispensations

5. Museum Governance

6. Collaborations and Fundraising

7. Earned Income

8. Review of Ethics Policy

- 8.1 Overview
- 8.2 Compliance
- 8.3 Public Disclosure
- 8.4 Revision

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Museum of Russian Icons (hereafter “the Museum”), a nonprofit educational entity and a responsible steward of the resources held in the public trust, is committed to public accountability and transparency in mission and operations. Through this statement on ethics, the Museum presents certain principles related to ethical conduct upon which it has operated in the past and upon which it will continue to operate in the future.

This ethics statement reflects the highest standards of ethical and professional practices and endorses in principle the American Alliance of Museum’s (AAM) Code of Ethics for Museums adopted and revised in 2000, as well as the specific codes of professional disciplines represented at the Museum. Where this statement and discipline-specific codes disagree, this statement shall prevail. The statement guides the institution and associated trustees, staff, and volunteers, who legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.

It is understood that all practices and procedures employed in fulfilling the mission, strategic direction, strategic plan, and annual plan of the Museum are consonant with but exceed all legal and regulatory requirements as established by international, federal, state, county, and municipal authority. Institutional policy and practice is established through the articles of incorporation, bylaws, and job descriptions of staff, volunteers, and trustees. The Museum’s Executive Director, directs the implementation of this statement through staff, volunteer, and trustee orientations.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Museum’s mission provides the focus, context, and direction for all collections activities.

Mission

The Museum of Russian Icons inspires the appreciation and study of Russian culture by collecting and exhibiting icons and related objects; igniting the interest of national and international audiences; and offering interactive educational programs. The Museum serves as a leading center for research and scholarship through the Center for Icon Studies and other institutional collaborations.

1.3 THE MUSEUM IN SOCIETY

The Museum, as directed by its mission, is committed to serving its public in education related to Russian art (especially Russian icons), Russian culture, and related and/or complementary material. The Museum provides superior maintenance and security of its assets, both physical and financial, and generates new knowledge about icons and related subjects through its research program and its *Journal of Icon Studies*. As such, the Museum adheres to the following:

Public Good - Aligns its activities with its mission to promote the public good rather than individual gain;

Diversity/Accessibility - Acknowledges, values, and respects the social, cultural, and individual diversity of all people in both its programs and hiring practices. The Museum will

use its best efforts to foster accessible exhibits, programs, organizational procedures, and operations. The Museum recognizes the value of sharing decision making with diverse audiences, communities, donors, members, staff, trustees, and volunteers;

Health/Safety - The Museum provides for the health and safety of its guests, volunteers, and employees through a continuing program designed to reduce and/or eliminate the possible causes of accidents and infection and to create the safest and healthiest environment possible in the fulfillment of the mission of the Museum.

2. COLLECTIONS

2.1 OVERVIEW

The Museum of Russian Icons will build its collection through two categories: the permanent collection and the contextual collection. The Museum's primary collecting goal is to acquire quality works that are representative of Russian culture. Acquisitions for this permanent collection may be made through purchase, gift, or bequest. Such objects are to be formally accessioned into the permanent collection.

The Museum may acquire other artifacts with intrinsic value that are outside the scope of the primary collection but are of sufficient interest for education and research. Acquisitions for this contextual collection may be made only through purchase, gift, bequest, or deaccessioning and transfer from permanent collection.

All acquisitions must be approved by the Board of Trustees prior to being formally accessioned into the collection. All purchases of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) or higher must be reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees prior to purchase.

2.2 ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION PROCESS

The Museum acquires items for the collections by means of donation, purchase, exchange, or any other transaction by which title to the items passes to the Museum. The Museum selects items for acquisition only under the following conditions:

Mission - The item or items are relevant to and consistent with the mission, purposes, and objectives of the Museum.

Care - The Museum can provide for the storage, protection, and preservation of the objects under conditions that assure their availability for Museum purposes and are in keeping with professionally accepted standards.

Provenance - The Museum shall take all reasonable steps to ascertain the provenance of all acquisitions. This process shall be guided by the policies of the UNESCO convention of November 14, 1970, and the U.S. Cultural Property Act of January 12, 1983, on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit export, import, and transfer of ownership of cultural property and the implementing provisions adopted by the signatory states.

Restrictions - It shall be the policy of the Museum that a title to all objects acquired for the collections should be obtained free and clear, without restrictions as to use or future disposition. However, if objects are accepted with restrictions or limitations, the conditions must be stated clearly in an instrument of conveyance, made part of the accession records for the objects, and be strictly observed by the Museum.

Title - A legal instrument of conveyance and a warranty of title, signed by the authorized donor, seller, or estate administrators/executors, and the Executive Director of the Museum, setting forth an adequate description of the objects involved and the precise conditions of transfer, will accompany all gifts, purchases and bequests, and will be kept on file at the Museum.

Appraisals - Legal, fiduciary, and ultimate responsibility for furnishing appraisals of value to governmental tax agencies rests with the donor. The Museum cannot give appraisals but will provide a representative list of appraisers if requested.

2.2.1 CRITERIA FOR ACQUISITION

The following criteria will be applied when making acquisitions of Russian icons and related materials for the permanent collection:

Artistic Quality - Objects should be assessed artistically according to skill and artistic merit, as determined by the Curator and as generally accepted by experts in the field.

Historical Importance - Icons are among the earliest visual images and art forms that emerged in the post-Roman Empire period in Western Europe and the Near East. It can be argued that the icon had a profound influence on development of Renaissance art, providing both form and function models for the early religious gold-ground panel paintings. The icon is a living tradition with Orthodox believers as well as with many icon artists. Many icons are being produced today for devotional and sacred purposes, relying on the same techniques and overall quality for the past one thousand years. The Museum aspires to build a representative Russian icon collection that reflects a broad range of dates, periods, regions, and styles, from the earliest representations to the present.

Condition - Icons, unlike Western paintings, were essentially functional objects, liturgically and physically in use. Consequently, they needed continuous maintenance and underwent various overhauls, restorations and repairs in the icon painting workshops every fifty years or so. Since the end of the nineteenth century they further underwent commercial “restorations” where the motive was not primarily conservation but salesmanship. An icon could undergo many “restoration” episodes in its life; these were sometimes skillful, sometimes not. Commercial restoration often employs techniques of disguise and subterfuge. There is a requirement to conduct a physical inspection of the paint film and a physical inspection of the panel support. Technical aids for such an inspection are good studio lighting (cold light) and ultraviolet light.

Dating - Very rarely is an icon inscribed with a date. Therefore, dating icons, and their attribution to particular cities or regions, is partly a matter of stylistic analysis,

technical analysis, historical knowledge and the sort of intuitive flare that can only be developed with experience.

Iconography - For every canonical standard there are countless exceptions, and for every liturgical convention there are an infinite number of variants. True “reading” of an icon requires a thorough working knowledge of the shifting theological currents the flow through the history of the production of icons from the sixth to the sixteenth century. Iconography is primarily not a matter of stories: the narrative element is not the most important and should be considered only after theological symbolism, historical significance, and artistic quality.

History - Knowledge of the history of icons demands a familiarity with late Roman culture and the Early Christian period in the age before Constantine. The foundation of Constantinople and the history of Byzantine civilization (303-1453) and its theocracy need to be well assimilated. It is essential to grasp the history of Christianity in Russia from the conversion of Vladimir (988) to the rise of Moscow and the unification of Russia in the fifteenth century. The “Golden Age” of icons in Russia, which comes to an end around the middle of the sixteenth century, is the reference for all later icon painting and the standard against which icons should be measured. It is also necessary to know the various revival schools of the nineteenth century. In addition, icon images are most often narrated with written words, thus knowledge of Church Slavonic to decipher these inscriptions is crucial.

2.2.2 CRITERIA FOR ACCESSION

Objects accepted for the collection are assigned an accession number and catalogued by the Registrar. The following records are maintained:

Accession Form - Basic information on each acquisition is written here before being entered into the Collections’ database program. The form is stored in the hard file and scanned into the digital file.

Photographs - Professional photographs are taken of each object in the collection and stored in the digital files and in the Collections database.

Hard Files - Folders containing all information pertinent to each acquisition – letters, warranties of title, appraisals, condition reports, accession and catalogue worksheets, research information, photographs, and so forth – filed by accession number. These materials are also scanned and stored in both the digital file and in the Collections database program.

Digital Files - The Museum’s network drive called “Share” has a folder named “Collection Files.” Each object has its own digital folder here with scanned documents from the hard files as well as any digital documents relating to the object. The Museum’s network drive called “Media” has a folder named “Object Photos.” Each object has its own digital folder with all photographs taken of it. This includes professional photographs, detailed close-ups, and photographs taken for condition and conservation reports.

Database - The Museum maintains an electronic database with a separate record for each object. Information contained in the database reflects that of the hard and electronic files. It also includes up-to-date locations, notes from researchers, and additional relevant information. As this database can be used to share the collection with the general public through the Museum's website, care should be taken to ensure that no sensitive data is inadvertently shared.

2.3 ACQUISITION TRANSACTIONS

2.3.1 GIFTS

Gifts shall not be deemed as accepted by the Museum until they are in the custody of the Museum. Any offer made via deed of gift must be approved by the Board of Trustees prior to being formally accessioned into the collection. The following gift categories will be accepted by the Museum:

Gift - Any donation of an artifact(s) by an individual or organization is categorized as a gift. To make a valid gift, there must be a clear intention on the part of the donor to transfer title and possession of the property. It is essential to the validity of such a gift that the transfer of both possession and title shall go into immediate effect. The donor must intend not only to turn the work itself over to the Museum, but also to relinquish the right of dominion. After a work is accepted by the curatorial staff, the donor is required to sign a standard deed of gift that commits the donor to the above criteria. Upon receipt of the deed of gift, the work will be presented for ratification at the following Board meeting.

Promised Gift - A donor may make a promised gift to the Museum. A promised gift is a commitment by the donor to give the work to the Museum. All promised gifts must be presented to the Museum.

2.3.2 PURCHASES

Objects categorized as purchases are those objects bought with endowed funds, acquisition committee funds, and restricted funds given to the Museum by a private source, or any combination thereof.

The identity of the seller in a sale must be clarified, especially in sales from an auction house or dealer when the actual owner may be a cosigner. This status must appear on the sales contract or other sales documentation. To protect against misrepresentation by a seller, it is critical that, prior to purchase, the object ownership be thoroughly studied. The Curator must insist upon full documentation from the seller when provenance is an issue. Although warranty of title is implied in every sale of a work, the Museum's Standard Purchase Agreement must be used or the vendor's bill of sale must be evaluated for warranty of title to ascertain that vendor conveys good title, free from encumbrances.

2.3.3 BEQUESTS

When the Museum is first notified that it is a beneficiary, the Curator must determine the specific objects included or any terms of the bequest. A copy of the will, or pertinent portion thereof,

should be obtained from the estate, by the Legal Officer, so that the nature of the gift can be verified. Photographs of the object(s) should be requested.

Bequests do not have to be accepted. It is the responsibility of the Curator to recommend to the Collection's Committee whether all, some, or no objects should be accepted for the collection; or whether all, some, or no objects should be accepted as property to be sold to benefit the collection. Once the recommendation is made and endorsed by the Collections Committee it then needs to be approved by the Board of Trustees. After approval, the executor of the estate must be notified of the Museum's intentions.

2.3.4 PERMANENT JOINT OWNERSHIP

Transactions involving binding terms for permanent joint ownership of an object will not be accepted by the Museum.

2.4 DOCUMENTATION AND PROVENANCE

The Museum will not purchase or accept as a gift, bequest, or loan any object it knows or has good reason to believe is of questionable provenance. In acquiring objects for the collection and in borrowing objects for exhibitions the Museum will make all reasonable inquiries to determine that it can obtain a clear title of purchase or gift or that the proposed lender has a clear title of purchase or gift. If it appears that an object offered to the Museum for purchase, gift, or loan is of questionable provenance the Curator must promptly report the pertinent facts to the Board of Trustees for further investigation and action.

3. PROGRAMS

Museum programs are intended to enhance public understanding and appreciation of Russian art, especially icons, culture, and history. Programs, exhibitions, publications, public events, and other activities are derived from the Museum's mission and values and will be responsive to the needs and concerns of the Museum's audience.

Discrimination - The Museum recognizes that all interpretation is directed from a cultural or personal context, and therefore strives to include alternative perspectives of any given issues being presented. Viewpoints that advocate or reflect discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or national origin, will not be included.

Intellectual Integrity - The programs the Museum offers will reflect the breadth of current scholarship and knowledge and maintain intellectual integrity.

Intellectual Property Rights - The Museum will abide by all copyright, fees, royalties, honoraria, or other intellectual property rights in the promotion, marketing, and educational programs of exhibitions and collections.

Accessibility - Museum programs will be accessible to and encourage the participation of the widest possible audiences consistent with the Museum's mission and its resources and community.

Public Good - Museum programs will promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.

4. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR TRUSTEES, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS

4.1 GENERAL DEPARTMENT

Employment and volunteerism at the Museum involve a position of public trust with great responsibility. In all activities, Museum employees and volunteers must act with integrity and in accordance with stringent professional ethical principles and objectivity in support of the Museum's mission and public trust responsibilities.

Public Perception - Staff must be aware that, to the public, employees at cultural organizations are never wholly separate from their institution.

Staff - As members of the Museum's team, staff are expected to contribute talents and energies to the environment and quality of the Museum and the Museum's services. Staff are expected to learn and demonstrate the Museum's values and enhance and support the future of the Museum in the community.

Respect - Relationships between trustees, staff, and volunteers are governed by mutual respect.

Volunteers - Volunteer participation in the Museum is vital to the organization's success. Trustees and employees should be supportive of volunteers and treat them as colleagues. The absence of monetary compensation for volunteers does not relieve them from adherence to this code of conduct, since volunteers and employees are equally perceived by the public as representing the Museum.

Political/Religious Activity - All political and religious activities shall be kept separate from the Museum workplace. An individual associated with the Museum shall not use the Museum property, materials, supplies, or equipment in connection with partisan political or religious activity

4.2 CONFIDENTIALITY

Trustees, staff, and volunteers shall keep privileged information in confidence except when that information is properly in the public domain or is released in fulfillment of the Museum's accountability to the public.

4.3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Museum trustees, staff, and volunteers shall act in accordance with the following:

No Compete – Staff must never use or abuse their official positions or their contacts within the Museum community for personal gain, or in any way impair the performance of their official duties, compete with the Museum, or bring discredit or embarrassment to the Museum or to the profession.

Standards – Staff shall maintain high moral standards of honesty, integrity, and loyalty to the Museum and shall refrain from any private or personal activity that might conflict, or appear to conflict, with the Museum’s goals, purposes, and operations.

Disclose/Recuse - When trustees, employees, or their family members have business interests with the Museum, the individual must a) disclose such interest or relationship and b) recuse him/herself from any discussion and/or action taken by the Museum and/or the Board. This policy applies equally to artist trustees or employees whose work is included or is being considered for acquisition to the Museum's collection or for temporary exhibition at the Museum.

4.4 RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLECTIONS AND OTHER MUSEUM PROPERTY

Deaccessioned Items - To avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived, deaccessioned Museum objects shall not be given or sold, publicly or privately, to members of the Museum community, including current Museum employees, unpaid staff (emeritus curators, research and department associates), volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees, or their representatives.

Deaccessioned Sales - In the event of public sale of deaccessioned Museum objects, members of the Museum community or their proxies are prohibited from participating due to the appearance of a conflict of interest.

All funds realized from the sale of deaccessioned collections objects will be placed in an account specifically designated for acquisitions or the direct care of the collections. No funds acquired from the sale of deaccessioned works shall go towards operating funds of the Museum.

Personal Use of Museum Collection - No staff should use for any personal purpose any object or item that is a part of the Museum’s collections or under the guardianship of the Museum.

Use of Museum property - Use of Museum physical and intellectual property, supplies, or other resources, including the name and reputation of the Museum, is permitted only for official business. Other use is not allowed unless authorized in writing by the appropriate Museum representative.

Employee Work - All work created by any employee in the course of his or her employment at the Museum constitutes works made for hire and is the physical and intellectual property of the Museum unless otherwise governed by contract, publication agreement, employee agreement, or law.

Private Collecting - Trustees and staff are strongly discouraged from collecting in the same field that they collect for the Museum. Staff may not compete with the Executive Director who will decide the proper course of action. In these instances, the Museum will have right of first refusal.

Estimates of Museum Collections - Staff may provide estimates of value of the Museum's collections for internal Museum purposes only. Staff will not provide monetary appraisals of objects for external parties.

Referrals of outside suppliers or services - Staff should be circumspect in referring the public to outside suppliers or services such as appraisal, conservation and restoration. Whenever possible, more than a single source should be provided so that no appearance of personal favoritism in referrals is created or the appearance of special endorsement that may expose the museum to legal dispute should the referred party move to act against the interests and expectation of a client.

Loans from Trustees or Staff - While loans of objects owned by a Trustee or staff member can be of great benefit to the Museum, it should be recognized that exhibition can enhance the value of the exhibited object. Therefore, sole consideration of the Museum in asking for and accepting such loans shall be the prospective benefit to the public in alignment with the Museum's mission.

4.5 OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

The Museum recognizes that certain compensated activities, including teaching, lecturing, writing, and consulting, can benefit both the Museum and a staff member by stimulating personal and professional development. Such activity should not interfere with the staff member's regular duties or compromise his or her functions at the Museum and must be approved by the Executive Director. Activities that conflict with curatorial or other staff responsibilities or that could cause staff to favor personal or outside interests over those of the Museum must be avoided.

4.6 GIFTS, FAVORS, DISCOUNTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Staff should be permitted to retain gifts of nominal value (less than \$50) from associates, the public, and constituents, when acceptance does not impair their judgment or otherwise influence decisions. Meals, accommodations and travel services while on official business may be accepted if clearly in the interest of the Museum. Museum employees have the right to accept and retain gifts that originate purely from genuine personal or family relationships, even if the individuals involved have a potentially beneficial relationship with the Museum. In such cases the staff members are obligated to protect both themselves and the Museum by fully disclosing the circumstances to the Museum Executive Director or designee.

5. MUSEUM GOVERNANCE

As the governing body of the Museum, the Board of Trustees serves the public interest as it relates to the Museum and must consider itself accountable to the public as well as to the institution. In all cases, the Board acts as the ultimate legal authority for the Museum and stands responsible for the formulation and maintenance of its general overall policies and standards. The Board is responsible for the following:

Plan - Establishing the mission and strategic direction, and approving the strategic plan, objectives and budget.

Day to Day Operations - Empowering the Executive Director to fulfill and manage the day-to-day operations of the Museum.

Museum Business - Conducting Museum business as a board, committee, or subcommittee or otherwise in conformance with the bylaws or applicable resolutions.

Conflicts of Interest - Filing with the Board a statement disclosing affiliations that could be construed as creating conflicts of interest, including their own personal, business, or organizational affiliations or those of persons close to them.

Abstaining - Disclosing situations that arise for action by the Board where there is a possible conflict or appearance of a conflict of interest. In those cases where the Trustee is present when a vote is taken in connection with such a question, he or she must abstain. In some circumstances Trustees should avoid discussing any planned actions, formally or informally, from which they might appear to benefit.

Personal Use of Information - Taking no advantage of information they receive during their service to the institution if their personal use of such information could be detrimental to the Museum.

Funding - Ensuring sufficient funding for protection of the Museum's assets and delivery of its programs and services.

Non-Profit Status - Ensuring no policies or activities jeopardize the Museum's non-profit status.

Financial Protection - Providing financial protection for trustees, staff, and volunteers for liabilities resulting from Museum activities.

6. COLLABORATIONS AND FUNDRAISING

The Museum adheres to the following precepts with respect to collaborations and fundraising:

Donations - The Museum seeks donations to augment its endowment.

Cooperation - The Museum welcomes appropriate cooperation with similar organizations to further its preservation, research, and educational goals.

Control - The Museum is in ultimate control of educational content in exhibits and programs. The recognition of external donors or sponsors is secondary.

Corporate Support - The Museum will acknowledge corporate support but will not specifically endorse any corporation, or its products or services.

Sponsorship - The Museum's reputation is one of its most precious assets and in no way shall any sponsorship diminish that reputation. In the case of some breach of morals, the sponsorship shall be dissolved.

Fundraising - Those involved in fundraising must do so with honesty as to need and must use funds for a donor's intended purposes. Opportunities and advantages shall be promised to donors equally.

Donor Records - All donor-related records and documents shall be confidential, except as required by law.

Accounting Records - The Museum shall keep standard accounting records.

Spending Funds - Those authorized to spend funds must do so with impartiality, honesty, and in the Museum's best interest.

Gifts with contingencies - Donor gifts with contingencies, other than those that relate specifically to fundraising challenges and matches, will not be accepted by the Museum without approval of the Board.

7. EARNED INCOME

Museum Shop and Tea Room

The Museum Shop and Tea Room shall provide quality products to support the Museum's mission, reinforce and expand the visitor's museum experience, and provide earned income.

Intellectual property rights

The Museum Shop will abide by all copyrights, fees, royalties, honoraria, or other intellectual property rights in the design, merchandising, and sale of all products.

Reproductions and replicas

All reproductions and replicas will be clearly and indelibly marked as such.

Deaccessioned materials

Deaccessioned materials will not be sold in the Museum Shop.

Rentals

The Museum shall offer for rental its facilities so long as the Executive Director, in consultation with the Board, determines that such rentals will not be detrimental to the Museum's mission and will not conflict with Museum exhibitions, programming, or fundraising activities. Rentals of the Museum facilities to conduct events of a religious or political nature shall be subject to the Museum's approval and shall not be construed as an endorsement by the Museum.

8. REVIEW OF ETHICS POLICY

8.1 Overview

This document will be reviewed and updated no later than every five years.

8.2 Compliance

All revisions will be guided by current AAM guidelines and professional museum standards.

8.3 Public disclosure

The Ethics Policy will be kept on the Museum's Website and made available to donors and other responsible persons on request.

8.4 Revision

Review and revision of the Ethics Policy is a collaborative effort of the Executive Director, other designated staff, and the Board of Trustees. Specific protocol for drafting revisions to the Ethics Policy will be agreed to at the time of the review.

History of Revisions of the Collections Management Policy:

Approved by the Board of Trustees, March 27, 2013

Updated June 2020