

ACUMG Responds to the Closure of the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University

The Association of College and University Museums and Galleries (ACUMG) and its national membership are fully cognizant of--and working hard to help address--the economic challenges all our universities and colleges are currently confronting. We are passionate in our commitment to the success of our respective academies and are ready and willing to help make difficult decisions that are deliberative and engage us with respect as serious stakeholders. With this caveat, we protest in the most unequivocal terms the decision by the Trustees of Brandeis University to close the Rose Art Museum and sell the art collections in its care and ask them to find the courage to reverse their action. This decision has broad-reaching ramifications, not only for the future reputation of Brandeis, but for all university and college museums nationally. This decision takes a significant toll on the quality of education that Brandeis currently offers and erodes public access to important works of art at a time in our history when visits to art museums are on the rise and in obverse proportion to the economic decline.

For Brandeis, this action will greatly diminish the educational experiences of its students. Teaching and learning with original works of art offer remarkable experiences that intellectually and romantically engage student interests in a manner that the study of secondary materials and reproductions never can. It engages students directly with the past and offers unprecedented opportunities for original research and learning. From a developmental perspective--so critical to private as well as public institutions--the message sent by the Trustees is that if you donate to Brandeis; don't expect your donation to be respected. Selling the art collection that so many individuals donated or helped fund is a betrayal of trust that will, in our opinion, not only shrink the pool of arts related donors, but all donors to Brandeis. And finally, the art market, like the stock market, is currently depressed and selling the art collection is, at its best, a very bad business decision. In other words, the fundamental claim for this decision is fallacious.

On a national scale, Brandeis is setting a dismal example to universities and colleges throughout the country. To capitalize that which is related directly to learning and sell it off to fund general operations or to bolster waning endowments is not only myopic, it also sets a dangerous precedent.

The ACUMG has long advocated that universities and colleges should establish appropriate exigency plans in advance of declines in enrollment or endowments: Exigency plans that involve deliberation with all stakeholders, including trustees, administrators, athletic program leaders, faculty, alumni/ae, and students. When such foresight does not take place, expediency takes precedence over intelligent discussion and the outrageous secretiveness of this action at Brandeis only diminishes our respect further for the university's leadership and its decision-making processes.

The divisiveness that will undoubtedly surface within the Brandeis community from this decision and the manner in which it was made, will be very costly to the institution for years to come and long after this economic downturn is reversed.