



Museum of Riverside Board Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: MUSEUM OF RIVERSIDE BOARD **DATE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2023**

FROM: MUSEUM COLLECTIONS **WARDS: ALL**
COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT: DEACCESSION FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION FIFTY-TWO INUIT
STONE SCULPTURES FROM THE ELLEN AND BERT WITT COLLECTION
(A1085)**

ISSUE:

To approve a recommendation to deaccession from the permanent collection fifty-two Inuit stone sculptures from the Ellen and Bert Witt Collection (A1085).

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Museum of Riverside Board recommends that City Council approve deaccession from the permanent collection of fifty-two Inuit stone sculptures from the Ellen and Bert Witt Collection (A1085).

BACKGROUND:

On 11 December 1978, the Museum Department took possession of the Ellen and Bert Witt Collection of fifty-seven Inuit sculptures with Museum Board approval on 8 January 1979. These objects were created by Canadian Inuit artists including Ali, Akatsiak, Aklukjuk, Aku, Apsaitak, Arlook, Ekagina, Hallow, Igutsiak, Inutuinak, Iraluajuk, Irkok, Iteegayakjuak, Ivaluardjuk, Kaayak, Kakee, Kal, Kanana, Kavik, Kayotnoaq, Keegooseeot, Kayotnoaq, Kingilik, Kringorn, Kudjuakju, Mangak, Micki, Mosesee, Nagjoogak, Naluk, Nanook, Nashaliitook, Natsuiapik, Neeakoonooak, Okangut, Okutak, Olayak, Panana, Pauta, Pissiyui, Pootoogook, Pudlo, Putulik, Qutalik, Saggiakjo, Sam Willer, Simiga, Tagonaguk, Tegodlagak, Tigitkok, Timungiuk, Tooloonasuk, Tungilik, Gupta, Ulakok, Unknown, and Vtuyak.

The Ellen and Bert Witt Collection included stones sculptures of animals, men, women, children, and Inuit spirits. Sixty percent of them have been infrequently exhibited at the Museum or loaned to other institutions, usually no more than one or two at a time. In 1982 the Museum's "Inuit Artists" exhibition featured thirty sculptures. The last such exhibition opportunity was in 2012 when the Museum hosted a traveling John Muir exhibition and supplemented it with eight Inuit sculptures. It is arguable that these exhibition opportunities were an outgrowth of the fact that

the Museum had the collection, not that there was a pivotal need to include Inuit sculptures in these exhibitions.

On June 14, 2023, all members present at the Museum of Riverside's Collections Committee meeting unanimously supported the recommendation to deaccession fifty-two Inuit sculptures from the Ellen and Bert Witt Collection (A1085).

DISCUSSION:

The term "deaccession" refers to the procedure of formally removing an object from a museum's permanent collection, after which the object may be considered for sale, exchange, gift, transfer to another entity, transfer to a collection other than the permanent collection, or – in the case of irretrievably deteriorated objects – disposal.

Museum staff have determined that this group of Inuit sculptures is unlikely to be utilized for exhibition in the foreseeable future, due to these sculptures' deviation from the Museum's mission, which centers on Riverside and its environs. Curatorial staff did select five to retain for the purpose of contextualizing the interpretation of regional Indigenous resources. This is in line with the Museum's intention and practice to retain for comparative purposes a number of other representative Indigenous North American resources from other non-California tribes—for example, Northwest Coast and Southwestern Pueblo. Regarding the remaining fifty-two sculptures, staff have determined that they fit deaccession criteria within the Museum's Collections Management Policy as follows:

1. The object/specimen is outside of the scope of the Museum's mission and guidelines set by Riverside Municipal Code (Chapter 2.12), acquisition policy, or is irrelevant to the purposes of the Museum.
5. The object/specimen has doubtful potential utilization in the near future in the Museum's exhibition and public programs.

Staff's recommendation regarding disposition of the deaccessioned sculptures is that they be sold for the benefit of the restricted fund for collection acquisitions.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The activities of the Museum of Riverside align with the Strategic Priority, "Arts, Culture and Recreation" and in particular goal 1.1 (strengthening Riverside's portfolio of arts, culture, recreation, senior, and lifelong learning programs and amenities), goal 1.2 (enhancing equitable access to arts, culture, and recreational service offerings and facilities), and goal 1.5 (supporting programs and amenities to further develop literacy, health, and education of children, youth, and seniors throughout the community).

1. **Community Trust** – Responsible management of the Museum's collections to reflect accurately the community's history requires judicious disposal of items that do not reflect the community yet require resources to steward. Thoughtful deaccessioning to build a strong collection builds community trust.

2. **Equity** – Deaccessioning is pursued to refine a collection and align it more closely to the Museum’s mission. This process consciously foregrounds equity across the community’s many neighborhoods and eras.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Deaccession of objects determined to be out of alignment with the Museum’s mission reduces operating costs devoted to collection care.
4. **Innovation** – Steady efforts to bring the collection into alignment with the Museum’s mission can involve difficult choices that many museums choose to avoid. The Museum of Riverside models best museum practices in moving forward with these efforts.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Deaccessioning actions result in improved use of resources as well as a more accurate reflection of a community, thus sustaining it as it sees itself.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report. Deaccessioned objects will be offered for public sale. Following Museum policy and museum field codes of ethics, net proceeds generated by such sales are restricted to future acquisitions for the permanent collection. Proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned objects are deposited into the Museum Deaccessioned Account 0000721-225252.

Prepared by: Robyn G. Peterson, Ph.D., Museum Director



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