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Gilles Néret-Minet
Drouot Richelieu
9, rue Drouot, 75009 Paris

Dear Monsieur Néret-Minet:

My name is Leroy Shingoitewa. I am the chairman of the Hopi Indian Tribe in Arizona, U.S.A. I write on behalf of the Hopi Tribe to ask your auction house to postpone the proposed auction of various Hopi religious objects, currently scheduled to take place on April 12, 2013, so that the tribe may have an opportunity to investigate the circumstances under which these religious objects were acquired.

You may be aware that, under the law of most jurisdictions in the United States, including the Hopi Tribe's jurisdiction, a subsequent purchaser cannot acquire good title to a stolen object. Objects representing religious and cultural patrimony may not be purchased, sold, or otherwise transferred. To do so is to commit a theft.

Judging from the photographs of the Hopi religious objects you intend to auction, it seems clear that they are genuine articles of religious and cultural patrimony. These Katsinam, or friends as the Hopi call them, represent the spirit of deceased ancestors, animals, natural features and events, and various deities. They are used by Hopis in connection with prayers and ceremonies in which Hopi religious leaders perform their trust obligation to protect the world.

The Hopis are an ancient culture. We have lived on the high mesas in Arizona for perhaps 2,000 years. During that time we have continuously engaged in the religious activity that forms the foundation of Hopi religion and culture. Without this religion there would be no Hopi people.

Given the importance of these ceremonial objects to Hopi religion, you can understand why Hopis regard their sale as a sacrilege and why they regard an auction not as a homage but as a desecration of their religion. There is insufficient time between now and April 12 to fully investigate the religious objects you propose to auction and to find out exactly how they were unlawfully acquired. We do not know, for example, when each of the objects was first taken or transferred, by whom, to whom, where, and under what circumstances. We do not even know

the name of the current owner or owners and are told that your auction house declines to reveal their identities. Without such information it is virtually impossible to commence the investigation we need to conduct in order to determine how these religious objects were improperly acquired.

You are quoted as saying you can prove that these religious objects were not stolen. If that is true, then presumably you have no objection to sharing that information with the people who have the strongest interest in knowing the answer. Please send me that information immediately so that we can evaluate the basis for your opinion.

Please also send to me copies of any certificates of ownership in your possession that you believe establish, or help establish, the chain of title for the Hopi religious objects you propose to sell. We need such information in order to evaluate your claims.

We have been told that, because you have made a substantial investment in preparing for the auction, you do not want to postpone it. Surely, in the interest of short-term profits, you would not intentionally deny to the Hopi Tribe, whose patrimony these religious objects are, a full and fair opportunity to discover the circumstances of their acquisition and how they should be returned to the Tribe, its religious societies, villages, and clans. The tenor of your advertising for the auction suggests that you do have respect for the Hopis and their religious values. If so, then surely you would want to join with us in making certain that the proposed auction does not violate legal norms or standards of decency we all share.


We recognize that it will be an inconvenience to postpone the auction for a reasonable period so that the Hopis have an opportunity to investigate the circumstances under which these religious objects were acquired. But against this inconvenience we must balance the deep interest of the Hopi people in preserving our religion and culture.

The Hopis have no control over the timing of the auction. We have known about it only for a short time, and it is taking place thousands of miles away. We need some additional time to discover the truth about the provenance of these religious objects, and we hope you will join with us in seeing that this goal is accomplished.

At this stage in the Hopi investigation -- which is nowhere near complete -- potential buyers at your auction must be informed that the Hopi Tribe suspects that the items you are offering for sale are stolen religious patrimony and may not be purchased or transferred without violating United States, international and French norms. At a minimum potential purchasers need to understand that, in purchasing these objects, they run the risk of participating in illegality.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number listed below.

Sincerely,



LeRoy N. Shingoitewa, Chairman
Hopi Tribe