

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2022

Daniel H. Weiss  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
1000 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10028-0198

Dear Mr. Weiss,

On August 18, 2022, New York Times published an article which outlined a dispute between Cambodian officials and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the “Met”) regarding the origins of 13 items in the Met’s extensive collection. As you know, the Met acquired these items over several decades from Douglas A.J. Latchford. In November, 2019, federal prosecutors charged Latchford with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, substantive wire fraud, and the smuggling of numerous Cambodian artifacts. Although the charges were dropped when Latchford died a year later, the accusations demonstrate the significant possibility that the Cambodian artifacts Latchford provided the Met were also stolen artifacts that belong in Cambodia. In fact, there is reason to believe that the list of stolen artifacts includes far more than the 13 which Latchford provided the Met.

Unfortunately, over decades of civil war, countless artifacts were illegally removed from Cambodia and sold to collectors and museums across the globe. Martin Lerner, the longtime curator of South and Southeast Asian art at the Met, who purchased artifacts from Latchford, even acknowledged that “Knowing what I know now, I should probably not have worked so closely with Mr. Latchford.” On August 8, 2022, Damian Williams, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York announced the return of 30 artifacts to Cambodia which were originally stolen and then sold by Latchford to two collectors and the Denver Art Museum. This step marks important progress, but there is still work to be done.

We understand that the Met is currently reviewing its Cambodian collection. The Met’s stated policy is that it “is committed to researching and publishing the provenance or ownership history of its collection. Research accomplished to date is made available online, and updated as completed.” We are encouraged by this policy of transparency and hope that the Met will follow through on this commitment as it investigates the true provenance of its Cambodian artifacts. However, the *New York Times* reported that despite its policy, the Met has failed to share internal findings related to Cambodia’s claims.

As the Met continues to review its Cambodian collection, we ask the following:

1. Can the Met update us on its investigation?
2. Has the Met set a deadline by which it intends to make determinations about the pieces in question?
  1. If so, what is that deadline and how was it reached?
3. Can the Met commit to working with the Department of Justice to determine where these priceless artifacts belong?
4. If the Met determines that these treasures were originally stolen, will it commit to returning them to the people of Cambodia.

Please send us your answers by December 18, 2022. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



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Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



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Steve Chabot  
Member of Congress

CC. Department of Justice