

March 29, 2013

Étude Neret-Minet Tessier & Sarrou  
Commissaires-Priseurs  
8, Rue Saint-Marc  
75002 Paris FRANCE

To the Directors,

I am the Director of the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, Arizona. If the name of the museum is familiar to you it is because this museum was founded by Harold S. Colton, my predecessor and the author of *Hopi Kachina Dolls*, the book you have cited as an authoritative source in the listing of 70 Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and Jemez “masques katsinam”, properly called “katsina friends” and advertised for an auction by your firm on April 12, 2013.

I am writing to request that you cancel this auction, withdraw the katsina friends from sale, and that they be returned by the “owner” to the Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and Jemez people. I have placed quotation marks around the word “owner” because no one can “own” them but the Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and Jemez people. Although katsina friends can be held and cared for by individuals, they belong to the communities from which they come or to specific ceremonial societies. Under tribal custom and law they cannot be sold or given away by an individual.

I can tell you from personal knowledge that the proposed sale of these katsina friends, and the international exposure of them, is causing outrage, sadness and stress among members the affected tribes. For them katsina friends are living beings, that is why they are called “friends” (kwatsi) in the Hopi language. The friends are loved, cared for, and ceremonially fed. They are a connection between the human world and the spirits of all living things and the ancestors. To be displayed disembodied in your catalogue and on the internet is sacrilegious and offensive. If one claims to value these katsina friends as “works of art” one must also respect the people who made them and the native traditions that govern their use. And, as fellow human beings, it is my hope that you will offer understanding and empathy to the tribal people who are so deeply affected by this proposed sale. You cannot honor and value these katsina friends while dishonoring their makers. These are universal principles of cross-cultural human conduct.

On behalf of the Museum of Northern Arizona, I appeal to your sense of decency and humanity and request that you terminate the auction and send these katsina friends to their proper homes among the native people in Arizona and New Mexico.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Breunig, Ph.D.  
Director, Museum of Northern Arizona

